



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 25, 2010

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 25, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)
[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to two petitions.

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IMPROVING TRADE WITHIN CANADA ACT

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Agreement on Internal Trade Implementation Act and the Crown Liability and Proceedings Act.

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

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on National Defence concerning the government's response to the third report. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government provide a comprehensive response to this report.

[English]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics in relation to supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011.

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-598, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (no GST on batteries for medical and assistive devices).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that would remove the federal sales tax from the purchase of batteries used in medical equipment or devices.

James McAllister is a senior in Vancouver Kingsway. He is living in a city with a high cost of living. He has medical expenses, and these include the purchase of batteries for essential medical devices. He was shocked that he had to pay tax on his medically necessary purchases.

There is an important principle reflected in our current law that sales taxes should not be charged on products that are essential for health and well-being. The initial purchase of medical devices, including the battery, is currently tax exempt, however, tax is charged on replacement batteries for these medically necessary devices.

Ending the sales tax on replacement batteries would fix an important oversight in our tax laws. The cost to taxpayers for this exemption will be slight, but would have a significant positive impact on many low income seniors in my community and across the country.

This is particularly important given that the HST in British Columbia has raised prices on other medically necessary purchases, including vitamins and over-the-counter medications.

As members of Parliament, we should all be in our communities talking to our constituents, hearing their concerns and proposing legislation to address their real concerns. I hope I can count on the support of all parties for this bill.

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

* * *

• (1005)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all the parties and if you seek it I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

Routine Proceedings

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the hon. member for Saint-Jean, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Tuesday, November 30, 2010, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: 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)

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

JUSTICE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise on behalf of literally thousands of people in my great riding of Sudbury and area to introduce petitions with their signatures relating to justice for an aboriginal man from the greater Sudbury area who was wrongly convicted.

Mr. John Moore was accused and convicted of second degree murder in the case where the Crown agreed that he was nowhere near the scene of the crime and where a trial determined that he had played no part in the planning of this crime.

Mr. Moore, an aboriginal man, was convicted in Sault Ste. Marie in 1979 by an all white jury, which resulted in 10 years in prison and a lifetime on parole.

The law used to convict Mr. Moore was later declared unconstitutional.

The signatories call on the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada to review the conviction in the case of Mr. Moore, recognize that a wrongful conviction occurred, overturn the conviction and enter an acquittal.

[*Translation*]

FRANKLIN BORDER CROSSING

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting a petition signed by over 100 residents of the town of Franklin. This petition is in addition to the one signed by 5,000 residents that I presented two weeks ago to the House calling on the Government of Canada to reconsider its decision to close the Franklin border crossing on April 1, 2011.

I should note that this decision was reached without notifying elected municipal officials and without consulting with businesses and residents or with their American neighbours. No public consultations or meetings were organized by the Canada Border Services Agency to discuss possible alternate solutions and explain this decision to municipal leaders and businesses that use this border crossing.

I wish to point out that this border crossing is important to our economy and tourism industry, to the safety of our residents and to the livelihood of the town of Franklin.

JAMIESON'S LINE BORDER CROSSING

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to present another petition to the House today, this one on behalf of the town of Elgin, in my riding. Signed by 300 residents, the petition calls on the House to stop the closing of the Jamieson's Line border crossing, also scheduled for April 1, 2011. For the same reasons, the residents of the town of Elgin object to the complete closure of their border crossing point, which is vital to their economy and their tourism industry, not to mention their safety. They want the agency to meet and consult with them, and to reconsider and suspend its decision.

● (1010)

[*English*]

SEEDS REGULATIONS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have petitions from the citizens of my riding of Don Valley East who are concerned about the seed regulation and regulations of novel foods and plants with novel traits.

The petitioners believe that these regulations do not include an assessment or consideration of the potential economic harm to farmers of the new GE crop releases. Therefore, they call upon Parliament to enshrine in legislation Bill C-474, An Act respecting the Seeds Regulations (analysis of potential harm), to amend the seeds regulations to require that an analysis of the potential harm to export markets be conducted before the sale of any new genetically engineered seed is permitted.

JUSTICE

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to present these petitions today containing the names of hundreds of people from across Ontario.

We have people from Sudbury, Levack, Copper Cliff, Toronto, Peterborough, Hanmer and Val Caron who are concerned about John Moore, an aboriginal man who was wrongly convicted and spent 10 years in prison, but the law that convicted him has since been struck down.

The petitioners would like the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada to review his conviction and pardon Mr. Moore as quickly as possible.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by dozens of Canadians to end Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan.

In May 2008, Parliament passed a resolution to withdraw Canadian Forces by July 2011. The Prime Minister, with agreement from the Liberal Party, broke his oft repeated promise to honour the parliamentary motion and, furthermore, refuses to put it to a parliamentary vote in the House.

Business of Supply

Committing 1,000 soldiers to a training mission still presents a danger to our troops and an unnecessary expense when our country is faced with a \$56 billion deficit. The military mission has cost Canadians more than \$18 billion so far, money that could have been used to improve health care and seniors' pensions right here in Canada.

Polls show that a clear majority do not want Canada's military presence to continue after the scheduled removal date of July 2011. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Prime Minister to honour the will of Parliament and bring the troops home now.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 431 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 431—**Ms. Joyce Murray:**

With regard to the Children's Fitness Tax Credit (CFTC): (a) for each fiscal year since 2007-2008, what was the total cost of the CFTC (i) nationally, (ii) by province and territory; (b) for each fiscal year since 2007-2008, what was the mean income of families that claimed the CFTC (i) nationally, (ii) by province and territory; (c) for each fiscal year since 2007-2008, what percentage of eligible families claimed the CFTC (i) nationally, (ii) by province and territory; (d) for each fiscal year since 2007-2008, for what specific activities were claims made under the CFTC and what was the proportion of funds expended for each activity; and (e) for each fiscal year since 2006-2007, what was the rate of participation in sports among children who meet the eligibility criteria of the CFTC?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN**

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ) moved:

That this House condemn the government's decision to unilaterally extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to 2014, whereby it is breaking two promises it made to Canadians, one made on May 10, 2006, in this House and repeated in the 2007 Throne Speech, that any military deployment would be subject to a vote in Parliament, and another made on January 6, 2010, that the mission in Afghanistan would become a strictly civilian commitment after 2011, without any military presence beyond what would be needed to protect the embassy.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for allowing me to put forward this motion on behalf

of our party. It is actually somewhat tragic that it has been left to the Bloc Québécois to debate the real issues regarding the mission in Afghanistan. These issues have been before us for a decade now. For some strange reason, the Bloc Québécois has had to step up and move a motion to force the House to debate and vote on this matter.

I intend to show that the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party have misled the House, among other things by breaking their word. I will give you very specific examples later. In my conclusion I will also be reaffirming that, for the third time in a row, the Bloc Québécois will object to the extension of the military mission in Afghanistan, for a number of reasons, one of which is that the burden is unevenly shared among NATO members.

Before I begin, I would like to describe briefly how I see an MP's job, for the benefit of those listening in. First of all, an MP is someone who is elected by the people, someone representing an electoral quotient, as it is called in political terms, of approximately 100,000 constituents. This is true for each member representing one of Canada's 308 electoral districts.

A candidate wages an election campaign. I have personally waged six campaigns, so I know what I am talking about. Running an election campaign is by no means easy because you are fighting opponents whose views differ from yours. The public ultimately decides who will represent them in the House of Commons. Members of the public choose their representatives. They do not have time to follow politics on a daily basis, so they place their trust in their elected official, not merely in the Prime Minister and his cabinet.

As the member for Saint-Jean, I am accountable to my constituents. When the next election is called, constituents will once again have to decide whether I have done a good job, listened to them, acted according to their wishes and stood up for them every day here in the House of Commons.

On election day, when the results come in, each of the 308 elected members of Parliament will become the legitimate official representative of their constituents. The familiar Latin expression *Vox populi, vox Dei* comes to mind, meaning that the voice of the people is the voice of God. The residents of the riding of Saint-Jean spoke in that godlike voice on election day, when they chose me as their MP. Each of the 308 members of the House of Commons also became legitimate representatives when they were elected.

So then we are here in the public arena, the House of Commons, the place where we discuss the issues, where we choose to have a democratic debate, with all the conflicting views such a debate may generate, and where we must not only debate the issues, but also vote on legislative measures. Voting is important, because a vote should represent the interests of our constituents—in the riding of Saint-Jean for me, and in the other members' ridings, for each of them. A vote can also reflect the sometimes opposing views of other members. Of course, the majority rules. Ultimately, then, the minority has to bow to the majority. In the House of Commons, we always have an opportunity to discuss issues, to try to bring an issue back into focus and to see things from a different perspective as time goes on. I think it is important to point that out.

Business of Supply

Entering the House of Commons means accepting certain principles. In my case, I accept that the Prime Minister has certain powers and that he has a lot of power, but not all the power. That is something very different. At certain times, the Prime Minister has to share his views and his power with the rest of the House. I believe that the issue before us today is deserving of the House's consideration. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, it has been the Bloc Québécois that has put the spotlight back on this issue, not the Prime Minister, who uses all sorts of arguments to justify his decision, arguments that I will refute shortly.

• (1015)

I said earlier that the government had broken its promise. And I have here six quotes where the government very clearly stated that it did not intend to take the approach adopted in Lisbon. Here are some examples.

This is what the Prime Minister said in January 2010:

[English]

But we will not be undertaking any activities that require any kind of military presence, other than the odd guard guarding an embassy....so, it will become a strictly civilian mission.

[Translation]

It was clear that the military component of the mission would be ending.

Several months later, the Prime Minister stated:

Mr. Speaker, I have the same answer that I had last week, and it will be the same next week: Canada's military mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011, in accordance with a resolution adopted by Parliament. We plan on remaining involved in Afghanistan in terms of development, governance and humanitarian assistance. We invite the opposition to share its ideas on the future of this mission.

Again, the statement made it very clear that the military component of the mission would end.

On April 11, 2010, the Minister of National Defence had this to say about the training of the Afghan army:

After 2011, the military mission will end.... What we will do beyond that point in the area of training will predominantly be in the area of policing. And that is very much a key component part of security for Afghanistan.... Let's be clear, it's speculation at this point. We're talking over a year before Canada's military mission will end.

It is interesting to note that the Minister of Foreign Affairs was also opposed to a vote in the House:

• (1020)

[English]

We have made it clear that the military will not be in Afghanistan] post-2011 and in that regard there is no need to have a debate in the House.

[Translation]

It is fairly clear: the military mission was supposed to end. In December 2009, the Chief of the Defence Staff had this to say:

Military operations must end in July 2011, according to the motion passed by the House of Commons. When we say "military", we mean all military personnel, including those assigned to the Provincial Reconstruction Team, those protecting our civilians and those involved in the training of Afghan forces. The plan is to bring all our military personnel home.

We were extremely surprised to hear rumours that between 950 and 1,000 soldiers would remain stationed in Afghanistan. Despite all the statements made over the past year, the opposite is occurring.

That is why we are saying that the Prime Minister and the Conservative government have broken their word. Hence the debate that we are having here today.

The Bloc Québécois stresses once again that the authority to deploy troops is extremely important and the Prime Minister must share this authority with the House of Commons. The Bloc and I have stated on numerous occasions that we take issue with the type of mission the government wishes to undertake. We do not have any issues with members of the military, who are following orders issued by the civil authorities.

I have stood alongside the military on numerous occasions. I went to Bosnia with the Royal 22nd Regiment, and I have been to Afghanistan three times. So, once again, I can say loud and clear that the armed forces are doing an exceptional job. They are not to blame. We object to the type of mission and to the manner in which operations are being conducted in Afghanistan under this government. That is why we need to force a debate on this issue today.

As the critic, it is my job not only to assess the mission, but also to review budgets and to determine whether it is time to declare war or peace. And that responsibility is shared by all the members of my party. That responsibility must be shared by Parliament and on every member of the House.

We have repeatedly criticized the fact that the government has reversed its policy. It has procured a tremendous amount of military equipment. We are not necessarily opposed to that, but we would have preferred that it be done in a much more structured way. This government is leading the country down a very militaristic path, which, by the way, began under the previous Liberal government. Today, there are hardly any peacekeeping missions left to speak of.

The purchase of strategic and tactical aircraft, armoured vehicles and other military equipment must be done with a specific purpose in mind. Why are we buying all this equipment?

The government set out the Canada first defence strategy, but the policy did not come from the Department of Foreign Affairs. The government should have put forward a foreign affairs policy outlining what Canada wants to achieve. There is only one department behind the strategy, the Department of National Defence, which is involved in foreign affairs. The government needs to state what the future objectives of the Canadian Forces are, and then it could buy equipment to achieve those objectives.

In terms of the process I just described, the government, unfortunately, did things backwards. It began by buying the equipment, and it plans to use that equipment in Afghanistan or elsewhere; it does not really know where. It has not established a clear foreign affairs policy. We are in a policy vacuum, and we are in serious trouble. Now that it has spent \$50 billion or \$60 billion on military equipment, will the government try to get its money's worth by coming up with a policy that makes use of that equipment? It should have done that first.

The Bloc Québécois is opposed to the mission as such. For some time now, delegations have been sent to speak to NATO authorities, and I was one of the first people to speak out about this. NATO should be sharing the burden of the military mission in Afghanistan. I have been to Afghanistan three times. I have been to the north, where I met up with German troops, and I can tell you that not much is happening there.

• (1025)

The problem is in the south. That is where Canadians are currently deployed, and where they have been positioned for several years now. We have often asked NATO authorities if there is some way to have the burden shared more equally, since we are paying a heavy toll, not just in human lives, but financially as well, to maintain a theatre of operations like the one in Kandahar, which is on the other side of the world. Equipment must be transported and housed and so forth. The costs are astronomical, and some are beginning to say that the final price tag for this mission will be \$20 billion.

Where Canadian troops are positioned in Afghanistan is important. They are in Taliban territory. They are suffering the greatest number of losses per capita. We are losing this conflict, which is escalating significantly, according to NATO and UN reports. For that reason, the Bloc Québécois feels that Canadian Forces have done enough. It is now time for someone else to take over. We could continue with a mission that ensures a police, development or diplomatic presence, aspects that are often overlooked. But we are hearing much more talk about the military component than about anything else.

The government maintains that our military will be behind the lines training soldiers. I saw what that entails when I travelled to Afghanistan. There is more involved in training soldiers. It is more than merely showing them how a safety catch works. It is quite a bit more complicated than that. Theory courses are not enough. Practical courses must be given as well. I have had my doubts ever since I heard that our military would be stationed in Kabul and would not be in the theatre of operations. And who confirmed my suspicions last week? None other than General Rick Hillier, the former Chief of the Defence Staff, who had this to say about training soldiers without going into combat:

[*English*]

You can come up with all kinds of schemes to hide away in camp and train people for the Afghan army, but they lack credibility. If you try to help train and develop the Afghan army...you are going to be in combat.

[*Translation*]

When you train troops, the first step is to show them how to hold and shoot a weapon, and how to get in basic position. Then it is just like hockey practice. Everything is easy in practice, but it is a different story when you play a real game. In a few years, we will find out that mentors coached troops in the theatre of operations. Movements and strategies need to be corrected in the heat of battle. If you are not there, you do not know what is happening. The general himself said that training would fall short if mentors did not accompany their students into the theatre of operations. So that is where things stand with training.

For the third time, when we vote on Tuesday, the Bloc Québécois will oppose the type of mission being put forward. We have

Business of Supply

examined the issue from every angle. In the past, it seemed that we did not have an exit strategy and that training was not happening fast enough. Now the training process has been sped up. We are going to vote for a third time because we have responsibilities to fulfill. My Liberal friends disappointed me the last time. For a year, prior to the most recent extension, I heard them say that the mission had lasted long enough. I very clearly remember them using the same arguments that I am today, especially with respect to the importance of rotation within NATO so the burden does not always fall on the same countries. Much to my surprise, they ultimately decided to back the Conservatives in extending the mission.

Today, we no longer want to extend the mission. That has been the long-held view. The government is contradicting what it has been saying for a year. No doubt it has come under pressure, but that does not justify a sudden about-face.

The Bloc's political position is in line with what Quebeckers want. According to recent polls, 78% of Quebeckers object to the new mission that the government wants to launch. Voters keep up with the news. Like us, they have been hearing for a year now that the military component would come to an end. We are not just talking about the combat aspect, because our military presence also includes training. We were all under the impression that there would probably be only one soldier left, the military attaché at the embassy in Kabul. But that is not what is happening now.

We all have to face the consequences of our actions when we decide to go to war. For several years, the focus has increasingly been on the combat mission instead of the peacekeeping mission. We should perhaps return to our peacekeeping missions. That would be more in line with what the public wants. We look at how things have evolved, and this needs to stop at some point. We think that it should have stopped a long time ago. Every time that the government makes these militaristic proposals, we should object and refuse to extend the mission.

According to my notes, I have attended the funerals of five soldiers. That is a direct consequence of the actions taken by the House of Commons. When we go to war there are consequences for everyone. It is unacceptable to have to stand beside the grave of a young soldier who was only 22, 23 or 25 years old. To date, 152 soldiers, one diplomat, one journalist and two humanitarian aid workers have been killed. That is a lot and does not include the thousands of wounded soldiers. We think that is enough.

We have spent \$20 billion, lost 152 soldiers and seen several hundred wounded. The sacrifice has become too great. We have suffered too much. We think that other NATO countries should provide assistance and that we should focus on a civilian approach with police officers, on the jail system and prison guards, on the justice system and so on.

• (1030)

It is time for our troops to come home.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has been to Afghanistan many times. He was with me when we visited Afghanistan. He is talking about the tragic consequences of losing people; soldiers and diplomats.

Yes, we have lost people. It is tragic, but that is the responsibility that Canada has undertaken under NATO. We are a responsible nation, a small nation, and our military has stood very strong. We can all, including the hon. member, be proud of what the military has done and what they are doing in Afghanistan, and that includes our diplomatic mission.

The fact of the matter is that we cannot pick and choose what is going to happen. It is a whole of government of Canada approach to diplomacy, to development, as well as to providing security.

For all the sacrifices Canadians have made, it is but natural that we leave that country to the Afghans. We have always said that Afghanistan is for Afghans, but it is our responsibility to ensure that we leave them with a trained force that they can take over themselves. We cannot leave them with a half-done job. We are the best trainers and we can teach them what we have learned.

That is why I am surprised that the Bloc is not willing to support this. They should be supporting and be proud of the Canadian military for the training mission they are doing. That is a great legacy that we leave behind for Afghanistan.

• (1035)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, we are definitely proud of what the Canadian Forces have done and what they likely will be doing. I see how things are progressing and I can see that the Conservatives and Liberals are once again planning to get into bed together.

However, my point still stands. Canada went to the worst region of the country, in the Taliban stronghold, during the first conflict in Afghanistan and we left troops there. There have been many discussions about rotations at NATO as well as at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, where the 28 countries are represented by parliamentarians, but the response has always been negative. That means that, in terms of Afghanistan's regions, troops are stationed in the north and east, where there are very few problems, and the others are left to carry all of the weight.

And that is why we are saying that enough is enough; it is time to bring the troops home.

[English]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his superb speech. I agree with much of what he has said in the House this morning.

I want to go back to the wording of the motion that is before us today. The motion actually says:

That this House condemn the government's decision to unilaterally extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to 2014...

It almost makes it seem that if the issue had come before a vote in this House that the member might have been okay with the extension of the mission.

I want to give the hon. member an opportunity to clarify whether he, like all of us in the NDP, believes that this extension is wrong, period, and that we should be bringing our troops home regardless of whether or not there is a vote in this House.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. If she would like me to make it perfectly clear, I will reiterate that we are against extending the mission in Afghanistan, particularly the military aspect.

We have nothing against continuing the humanitarian or diplomatic aspects, but the military mission needs to end, as we have said before. This is not the first time we have said it; this will be the third time in a row that the Bloc Québécois has repeated that it is against the military mission in Afghanistan.

This needs to be clear-cut and specific: the Bloc is going to object. Vote or not, we would have objected. When the Lisbon proposal was made public, we criticized it and said that we did not agree with it.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Jean on his excellent speech on the motion we moved here today.

I would like to ask him a question about something he mentioned in his speech regarding the Prime Minister's commitment to end this mission in 2011 and the fact that he is now renegeing on that promise. That was just one of the many speeches the hon. member for Saint-Jean has made in this House.

What worries me about what my colleague said is that people are becoming more and more cynical about politics. They are becoming increasingly suspicious of political posturing. They no longer believe in their elected officials. This is a perfect example of manipulation: first the Prime Minister promises to end the mission and says the House will have to vote on extending the mission, but then, with the support of the Liberals and his party, he goes ahead and extends the mission anyway.

I wonder what my colleague's thoughts are on this.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The government has indeed lost all credibility in this file over the past year. The statements were so explicit and precise that it was considered a done deal. Even the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the military attaché in Kabul would be the only one to stay on. Now this is going even further, because when he was in Lisbon, there was talk about the fact that the mission might be extended beyond 2014. I very clearly remember the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs saying that it would end in 2014. That is exactly what they had said a few years ago. At the time, they were talking about a troop withdrawal in 2011, but that is no longer the case. Thus, they have lost all credibility.

Business of Supply

We in the Bloc Québécois, however, have always remained consistent. When we say something is bad, it is bad. At that is what we said: that we do not want the military mission to continue after 2011.

• (1040)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must express my sincere regret at the position the member in particular has taken, having been a party in the delegation to Afghanistan in May. He was there. He saw the faces of the people. He saw the faces of the Afghans and the Canadians who were serving the Afghans. I say shame on him for the position he has taken.

He has talked about the fact that Canada should be involved in peacekeeping missions. How would he keep the peace? Would he keep the peace by sending in more foreign troops or would he keep the peace by training the Afghani troops so that they can look after their own affairs? We are equipping the people of Afghanistan to look after themselves.

The member should be condemned for having brought forward this motion in the first place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, shame on him because, in this place, there is freedom of expression. We are not contradicting ourselves. We have said three times that we do not want an extension. We are far from contradicting ourselves and, furthermore, we represent the people of Quebec who have told us that they are against it.

I hope he will not again dredge up the argument that if we oppose the government, then we support the Taliban. That is not how a democracy works. It is not true that we will all be singing the same tune. It is not true that we will all be saying the same thing. It is not true that just because the government presents a position we will be in favour of it. We have the right to disagree in this Parliament and that is parliamentary democracy.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is just a quick question based on the exchange.

We know that the government broke its promise. We know that the government was supported by the Liberals to break its promise. The question is: What are we getting in return? What we are getting in return is a cut of \$200 million to the civilian mission and, instead, we will get \$1.5 billion in terms of the military extension. Does the member think that is a good investment and it will make a difference?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. However, I would say to him that we have known for a long time that the mission is not balanced. We have been saying for years that the military mission has been receiving ten times more than development and diplomacy initiatives. That has not changed. Humanitarian aid will be reduced, but the military mission will receive an additional \$500 million to \$700 million per year over the

next three years. There is still an imbalance, and this is another reason why we object to extending this mission.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. Minister of National Defence.

By the time the Canadian Forces complete their combat mission in Kandahar in 2011, Canada will have been involved in Afghanistan for a decade—the longest military combat engagement in Canadian history.

From the beginning, the dedication shown by the Canadian Forces and Canadian civilians, and the considerable efforts they continue to make today, have shaped our nation's understanding of sacrifice and service. We should not forget why we went to Afghanistan in the first place.

Canada is in Afghanistan for one very clear reason: Canada's national security. We went to Afghanistan following the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, when 2,976 people from 77 countries were killed, including 24 Canadians.

Under the Taliban regime, Afghanistan had become a safe haven for international terrorists, providing al-Qaeda with an ideal stronghold from which to organize a series of international terrorist attacks.

The events of September 11 made it terrifyingly clear that we were all vulnerable and that innocent citizens anywhere could and would be targeted by this new breed of international terrorists. Borders no longer mattered. We had a responsibility as a global citizen. Thanks to the international community's efforts and Canada's sacrifices in Kandahar, Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven for terrorists. And the Taliban are no longer controlling the lives of the Afghan people, denying them fundamental freedoms and rights.

• (1045)

[*English*]

Canada is in Afghanistan as part of a UN-mandated, NATO-led mission with over 60 other nations and international organizations at the request of the democratically elected Afghan government. Let us also remember that Canada's ultimate goal is to leave Afghanistan to Afghans, as a country that is better governed, more peaceful and more secure. We are helping to create the necessary conditions that allow Afghans themselves to achieve a political solution to the conflict.

Canada has made a tremendous contribution. The ultimate sacrifice was made by 152 members of our Canadian Forces, one diplomat, one journalist and two NGO aid workers, working to keep us safe, to defend our values and to help Afghanistan emerge as a more secure and peaceful society. We must honour the legacy of those brave men and women and continue building on what we have achieved and learned in Afghanistan. We do this because our work in Afghanistan is not yet complete.

Business of Supply

We have been one of NATO's top six force contributors to the military mission. We have contributed nearly \$2 billion in development assistance, making us one of the top bilateral donors. Canadian Forces have been deployed in Kandahar province, one of the most dangerous places on earth, for five years. Home of the Taliban, the province lies at the heart of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Through the courageous efforts of our armed forces, the terrorist threat has been contained, allowing Afghans the security to live and to breathe. We must build on what we have learned in Kandahar to continue the training necessary to solidify our gains and sustain our investment. We still have work to do.

Security in Afghanistan is not yet sustainable, nor are the gains we made irreversible. This is why we must stay.

[*Translation*]

We have always understood that Afghanistan could not rise up out of the ashes of 30 years of conflict and civil strife through military force alone.

From the outset of our engagement in Afghanistan, we have pursued a whole of government strategy, complementing our military engagement with civilian efforts to build governance and security structures in Afghanistan and to support development in that country. Canada's contribution has focused on helping to rebuild government services, the national army, the national police, education, health care and respect for human rights.

[*English*]

We have worked in partnership with the Afghan government to strengthen the Afghan national army's capacity to conduct operations and sustain a more secure environment and increase the Afghan national police ability to promote law and order in the province of Kandahar.

We helped build the Afghan government's institutional capacity to deliver core services and promote economic growth, enhancing the confidence of Kandaharis in their government.

We provided humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons.

We enhanced border security, with facilitation of bilateral dialogue between officials from Pakistan and Afghanistan.

We advanced Afghanistan's capacity for democratic governance by contributing to effective, accountable public institutions and electoral process.

We supported Afghan-led efforts towards political reconciliation.

Canada's approach recognizes that Afghanistan cannot create the conditions for sustainable peace through military means alone.

• (1050)

[*Translation*]

When we first arrived in Afghanistan, the education system was crippled and girls' schools were closed. Today an estimated 6 million children are now in school, one-third of them girls—the highest enrolment rate in the country's history. Canada continues to build,

expand and repair schools in Kandahar province, having completed work on 26 schools thus far.

Under Taliban rule, human rights and women's rights were non-existent. Today, those rights are enshrined within the country's constitution. Canada has fought for the establishment and protection of those human rights in Afghanistan including the rights of women and children. The promotion and protection of human rights, including women's rights, is a core element of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan.

Canada is actively supporting Afghan justice sector reform, with a view to strengthening capacity and promoting human rights. Canada provides ongoing support to the Government of Afghanistan and Afghan organizations to build their capacity to ensure that laws respect the Afghan constitution and the country's international human rights obligations.

Canada supports the Afghan Ministry of Justice's human rights support unit through a \$1.3 million contribution. The unit will help Afghan governance bodies to incorporate and internalize human rights in their legislation, policies and respective areas of responsibility.

[*English*]

While these gains are remarkable, without our help they remain fragile.

I reiterate that our work in Afghanistan is not yet complete. Decades of conflict left Afghanistan and Pakistan deeply distrustful of each other. Canada has worked to help strengthen those relations by bringing Afghan and Pakistani border officials together, often for the first time through the Dubai process.

Long-term peace can only come about through dialogue and mutual understanding. Well-managed borders are instrumental for long-term economic development, as well as for long-term stability and security.

As one of Canada's priorities, we have played a central role in helping Afghanistan generate customs revenue and battle corruption in customs sectors.

Canada remains committed and has always said that we would remain engaged after 2011. We are respecting the parliamentary motion and we will build on what we have learned through the outstanding work of Canada in Kandahar.

The key to a stable and more secure future in Afghanistan is its ability to provide for its own security. Security is the foundation for progress. This is why the government has decided that it will provide Canadian Forces personnel to the NATO training mission in Afghanistan to continue training the Afghan national security forces over the next three years. We will provide 950 military trainers and support personnel.

Business of Supply

We will also focus on four themes: we will invest in the future of Afghan children and youth, notably through education and health; we will work to advance security, the rule of law and human rights; we will promote good regional relations, which are key to the future of Afghanistan, through active diplomacy; and we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance.

[Translation]

Our commitment to the Afghan people is clear and unwavering. We are working harder than ever with Afghans, and closer together as an international community, to create the conditions for a more prosperous, better governed and more secure Afghanistan.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know the opinion of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the statement he made here in March 2010, which reads:

[English]

We have made it clear that the military will not be [in Afghanistan] post-2011 and in that regard there is no need to have a debate in the House

[Translation]

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell me what has happened since March 2010 to make him do a complete 180? I think that the debate we are having right now is very civilized and polite.

Was the reason for this drastic about-face pressure from our NATO allies, particularly the Americans?

Does the minister agree that this is the statement he made in March? If so, then why is he now changing direction?

• (1055)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, the direction that Canada is now taking with its action plan is clearly based not only on recognition, but also on the government's very formal promise to end the combat mission. In this regard, we are respecting the motion adopted in the House of Commons in March 2008.

Consequently, there is no contradiction in what I said regarding the action that the government has taken. As I said in my speech, needs clearly exist—assistance and development needs, as well as training needs.

Our commitment to send 950 Canadian soldiers to carry out these training tasks is therefore in keeping with and a consequence of our previous statement, in other words, these soldiers are not being sent there as combatants, but as trainers. Thus, I think that our actions are completely consistent with the decision that was made and with the commitment we and other NATO countries made to the international community.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister to comment on the statement of the Prime Minister on June 4, in which he said:

We are working according to the parliamentary resolution that was adopted in 2008 by which Canada's military mission will end and will transition to a civilian and development mission at the end of 2011

He prefaced that by saying:

I think we've been very clear.

It is very clear from that statement that the military mission, not the combat mission, would end in 2011. That is what Canadians believed and now we are reinventing the past. I want the minister to acknowledge that he is reinventing the past, because Canadians were told that the military mission would end.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, indeed we have respected to the letter the motion that was adopted here in March 2008. We have indicated that we will put an end to our combat mission in Kandahar. That is exactly what we are doing.

We are now looking at centring our help, our aid, our development, as well as our training mission, in Kabul where indeed we have asked and we have been asked by our allies to be able to provide a number of trainers. This is something that the Canadian Forces do extremely well. In the course of the next three years, our Canadian commitment will be in terms of training the Afghan national army to be able to meet its objectives, but also in terms of development.

I have spoken of four themes that we are going to be focusing on. We are going to be focusing on health, on education and on regional diplomacy. Those are things that our colleagues, members of ISAF, members of NATO, and indeed members of the United Nations, all wish us to do because we want to leave that country in a more sustainable fashion and a more sustainable manner.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in this important debate with respect to Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.

As we all know, the Canadian Forces have been a fundamental part of Canada's whole of government approach to the mission in Afghanistan to help Afghans build stronger institutions and a stable environment in their country. This is a monumental undertaking, to be clear, given the history and the complexity of that country.

Our men and women in uniform, along with their civilian counterparts, have done an outstanding job and incredible work in Afghanistan. Their steadfast dedication to the mission and to the Afghan people is making a real difference. In fact, it came at quite a price. My colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has referenced the fact that 152 Canadian Forces were lost, civilian lives as well, and many have suffered grievous physical and psychological injury. That solid understanding is very important to keep in the context of what our country has brought to this mission.

I have made a dozen or more visits in the past number of years and I can say that the security situation is in fact improving. Tangible evidence is there, evidence which should be a great source of pride for Canadians.

All of this improvement in Afghanistan, and in particular around Kandahar, has been the result of these brave men and women in uniform and their civilian partners putting their all into improving the situation for Afghans, and in fact for the international community at large.

Business of Supply

In five of the last seven years we have been in Kandahar province, which has been described aptly as the heartland of the Taliban and the most difficult terrain to capture and keep. The accomplishments are many and the commitment unwavering. The Canadian Forces, with their international partners, prevented the region from falling back into the hands of the Taliban. They built roads and dug wells in wadis. They enabled education, vaccination, much of the very tangible condition for commerce to flourish in the future, micro finance in particular as a highlight for women in that country. All of this is done under the umbrella and the sometimes very difficult to maintain protective yet impenetrable perimeter of safety provided by the Canadian Forces and ISAF.

They are helping to bring about stability and a sense of normalcy to the people long held hostage by tyranny and violence. Human rights and quality of life are very much improving and are attributable to those efforts.

Thanks to the soldiers' professionalism and hard work, Kandahar can now envision a more peaceful and prosperous future than it could just a few short years ago.

• (1100)

[Translation]

In keeping with the 2008 parliamentary motion, the government has decided that there will be no combat role for our military in Kandahar past July 2011. Canada and Canadians are proud of the way the Canadian Forces have assumed their share of the burden in this difficult region.

And starting in July 2011, our NATO and Afghan partners will assume responsibility for security in Kandahar, building on the exceptional work accomplished by the men and women of our military.

The government still believes, however, that there is an important role for the Canadian Forces to play in Afghanistan.

That role will reinforce the successes achieved so far by our military in training and mentoring the Afghan National Army.

[English]

Since the adoption of the Afghanistan Compact and the extension of the ISAF mission to all of Afghanistan, training the Afghan national security forces has been a key objective of the international mission. ISAF participating nations along with the Afghan government understood from the beginning that any mission success would not be sustainable unless the Afghans themselves could assume responsibility for their country's own security.

They established important targets with a view to growing and enhancing the Afghan national security forces, both army and police. The Canadian Forces have already been at the forefront of the training and mentoring provided to the Afghan national security forces over the last few years.

Among other important accomplishments, Canadians are clearly very good at training. It is the approach, attitude and engagement which Canadians naturally bring to this task. Yes, combat skills are transferable. This has been one of the core objectives of our military

and one of the six priorities identified for the Canadian mission two years ago.

Over the course of my visits there, I have had the opportunity to witness some of the great work members of our military have been doing in support of the development of the Afghan national security forces. Their professionalism, dedication and personal hands-on approach is nothing short of spectacular. The way in which they have done this has earned the admiration and respect of our Afghan and international partners.

Just last month, for instance, the Minister of Veterans Affairs and I visited the junior officer staff course in Kabul, a key component of Canada's efforts to enhance the professionalism of the Afghan national army. We also toured the site where a new Canadian-funded facility is being built to house the course.

We went to Camp Nathan Smith where our provincial reconstruction team provides essential training to the members of the Afghan police, corrections services, border guards and judicial system. The efforts of our whole of government team to lead Afghans to build stronger institutions and more effective governance mechanisms are quite remarkable.

Just four years ago the Canadian Forces were working with only a few hundred Afghan army personnel in Kandahar. When, for example, our military launched Operation Medusa in 2006 led by General Fraser, one of the most significant and galvanizing firefighting in the entire mission aimed at disrupting insurgents in Kandahar, the Afghan army had only basic skills and its involvement in the operation was limited.

As we speak, close to 400 Canadian Forces personnel are now engaged in instructing, training and mentoring members of the Afghan national security forces and providing support services. They are mentoring an ANA brigade, or kandak, of 4,500 troops that is actively engaged in planning, conducting and holding ground in Kandahar in the operation.

Today the Afghan army is fielding approximately 10,500 personnel as part of Operation Hamkari in an Afghan-led initiative designed to improve security and strengthen governance, enable economic development and build trust in Kandahar province.

This means that in four years Canadian Forces moved from waging combat operations with the ANA on the sideline to supporting broader Afghan government and military operations where combat is not the main focus. They have in fact stepped up and stepped forward in that role. This is impressive in such a short period of time. It clearly illustrates the fundamental requirement for our capable, confident Afghan national security force. The more we do, the safer Afghanistan becomes and the better the world is.

Across Afghanistan, our allies and partners in ISAF have put considerable efforts toward the goal of empowering the Afghan national security forces. At the NATO summit in 2009, the alliance confirmed the creation of the NATO training mission in Afghanistan, where Major General Stu Beare is playing an important leadership role on behalf of our country. This mission's objective is to coordinate international efforts to train the Afghan army and police, and increase coherence and effectiveness across the board.

Business of Supply

ISAF's focus on training the Afghan national security forces is delivering significant results. Over the course of the last 12 months alone, Afghan forces, the army and police have grown by 70,600 in number. The ANA now stands at 134,000 and is on track to meet the expansion targets of 171,000 troops by October of next year, up from a troop force of about 17,000 in 2001. It has increased tenfold.

NATO allies and partners, including Canada, have helped mentor and train about 50,000 Afghan security forces, shoulder to shoulder.

•(1105)

As we speak, we are seeing remarkable achievements. We maintain that we must continue to do this for the Afghans themselves and for the security of Canadians as well. In spite of great strides by the Afghan national security forces, we still have challenges there. The Afghan army needs to strengthen its institutional capability in key decisions on how to deploy resources and to reinforce the military culture. We need to increase the capacity to support operations by building logistics and engineer capabilities.

These are a few examples of what we need to do to continue and yet the next phase of the Canadian Forces mission is clearly focused exclusively now on supporting ISAF's capacity building for the Afghan forces with up to 950 trainers and support staff to be deployed at facilities centred near Kabul.

This mission becomes an opportunity to see Canada's legacy continue and remain well rooted in the important sacrifice and commitment that has been demonstrated throughout.

Finally, it will help build a solid foundation for Afghan institutions and governance including those key security forces, well led, well trained and well equipped. This is what will be the essential ingredient for a safe and democratic future for Afghans, giving them the skills to do what we have done for them.

As long as this world spins, there will always be a need and requests for Canadian soldiers to deploy. We are very proud of what they have done across the board and we will support them as they move on to their new role in Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech of the Minister of National Defence. I do not agree with his position, but it is important to have a debate here in the House, and that is why the Bloc Québécois introduced this motion.

I would like the minister to comment on a part of the Conservatives' election platform in 2006. The platform said that the Conservative government would make Parliament responsible for oversight over the conduct of Canadian foreign policy and the commitment of the Canadian Forces to foreign operations. But what is happening? We can see that the government is going ahead with the mission in Afghanistan until 2014. So the government has taken different positions, as the Prime Minister did in the past. We are witnessing a democratic deficit with this position, which is contradictory to the position taken in the 2006 election campaign.

I would also like to hear his comments on General Hillier's statement on the mission in Afghanistan. He said that, when training police and the army, there is no way around a more aggressive

military combat mission. I would like to hear what the Minister of National Defence has to say about that.

•(1110)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for his contribution to the debate. It is an example of participation, showing the importance of an opportunity like this to continue the debate on the mission in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

This is a perfect example of what soldiers have done for generations in allowing countries like ours to have respectful disagreements, where we can hear one another across the aisle and disagree sometimes passionately.

With respect to the gap, the gap is not one in democracy. The gap is one in understanding, I would respectfully say to my friend opposite.

Yes, there is a change in the mission, but the change is consistent with the parliamentary motion. The change is very consistent with the ongoing discussions that we have had at committee, here in the House of Commons, in previous debates, and in the ability to be scrutinized by the media and members opposite.

We are very fortunate to live in a country like Canada where, rather than take up arms, we can have very adamant, strident positions held that are diametrically opposed and yet we have the opportunity to come before the House of Commons and the Canadian people and put those statements forward, take those positions.

This is very much in keeping with what we hope to establish in a country like Afghanistan.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope we are able to accomplish a little more transparency in Afghanistan. Clearly, the government is not giving the Afghans a very good model. We were promised there would be a vote. It is gone. We were promised that all the details would be put before the House and that we would understand what we were going to be deciding on when we passed at least the budget. We do not have that. In fact, we do not even have ministers who know the numbers at this point.

My question is very specific. What we do know is that both the Pentagon and NATO have said they are going to meet their targets of training troops. We know that. It was initially 134,000, then 160,000 and 171,500 by next year. That will be done.

What we want to know is why the government cannot even tell us how much it is going to spend in the areas of the civilian mission. We were going to spend \$550 million up until two weeks ago when the government decided to cut that and not even tell people at the Afghan task force.

What we need to know is where that money is going to be spent for diplomacy. We could not get that information from people at the committee yesterday. I wonder if the minister would know. All we have been told is it is \$100 million and the government will figure it out eventually. Where is the money for diplomacy going to be spent?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, there is money for diplomacy, for development, for reconstruction and, of course, for the continuation of the training mission.

Business of Supply

For the member opposite to suggest that there is an opportunity to vote is utter nonsense. It is betrayed by the fact that we will have a vote on this motion. We have had votes previously, obviously on the deployment of the military, but this is not a situation where members of the Canadian Forces will be in combat. That is what was delineated. That is the line in the sand, so to speak. That was an executive decision taken by the government. However, even with that backdrop, even with that historical context, our Prime Minister and our government decided they would have a vote with respect to the combat mission.

Let us be clear that the majority of the House supports the continuation of the mission. That is democratic and it is inclusive. I thank the member opposite, the critic for the Liberal Party, with respect to this particular issue where we have the consensus of the House to continue with the training, with democracy building, with reconstruction and with development. The member may not like that fact but there it is for all to see.

• (1115)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate.

Like all members, I learned just before coming into the House that Premier Williams of Newfoundland and Labrador has announced his retirement as the premier of that province.

Since the premier and I were both chosen to go to Oxford University on the same day at the same time from different provinces, I have always felt a very special kinship with him. I offer him the sincerest thanks of the Liberal Party of Canada and of Canadians everywhere for his service and, if I may say so, for the indomitable spirit and energy with which he has led the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I want to assure members that I will get to the present very quickly, but in 1938 the most popular politician in the western world was Neville Chamberlain. Neville Chamberlain was the man who, after the Munich agreement, told the British public on a famous broadcast that there was absolutely no reason for people to go to war because of a dispute between two or three ethnic groups that were fighting in a country that was very far away and of which we knew almost nothing. I think I am almost quoting his words verbatim.

Seventeen months later, the Second World War broke out and, at that point, Mr. Chamberlain was no longer the most popular politician in the western world because, while he had told people what he thought they wanted to hear, in 1938 events very quickly overtook him and the world. I want to suggest to people that it is important for us to recall and reflect on that period of time as we try to understand the circumstances in which we find ourselves today.

As the foreign affairs critic for the Liberal Party, together with other members of Parliament, I have had an opportunity to visit Afghanistan on a number of occasions, both before I was an MP and after being elected to Parliament. I have had chances to visit the regions in Pakistan and in India. I had a lot of conversations with people about the challenges in the region.

I do not claim to have any monopoly of expertise or any monopoly of information. I am in the opposition and therefore do not have access to a lot of information that the government has.

However, I do have certain instincts with respect to that situation that have always, I hope, been fuelled by information. I appreciated the comments made by both ministers today because they have added a little to the information that we have.

[*Translation*]

We are here today to discuss a motion by our friends in the Bloc Québécois. The Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party say that the Prime Minister has often said there would be no troops in Afghanistan after 2011. The Bloc Québécois quotes what General Hillier said two or three years ago, namely that it is impossible to provide training and development to troops without there being combat. I do not recall the date given by the hon. member for Saint-Jean. According to him, the decision by our Canadian government to accept a non-combat role in Afghanistan after 2011, with the presence of hundreds of Canadian troops providing training and development, shows that there is no democracy in Canada, that the government and the official opposition are allegedly dishonest, have no idea of what they are doing and are telling falsehoods to the population.

I can honestly say to my colleague from Saint-Jean, whom I know very well from having worked with him on two committees—as I shall continue to do—that I do not share his point of view. First of all, Canada has certain international obligations to the UN and to its NATO partners. I have often said in the House that it is a pity that the other NATO members have not taken their responsibilities toward Afghanistan more seriously. Our 2008 resolution clearly states that we are going to abandon the combat mission in Kandahar after 2011. It is natural that our friends in NATO should have wondered and are still wondering what we are going to do to keep up our assistance program in Afghanistan.

I have been asked whether NATO has exerted any pressure. I don't know if it can be called pressure, but it is natural that our partners in NATO, including the United States, should ask us what we are prepared to do, while honouring the will of the House of Commons and the positions of the political parties of Canada.

• (1120)

[*English*]

I make no apology for saying that it is very clear what went on. A number of people, including this member and a number of other people, told the government that it should not exclude the possibility of a training mission if that fits in with the strategy that NATO and the United Nations are trying to establish in order to achieve the objective, which is very clearly set out and repeated again in the Lisbon statement this past weekend, and that is that we move from a position where it is NATO and other countries that are carrying the military load in Afghanistan to a point where it is the government of Afghanistan that takes on an ever-increasing degree of responsibility for the safety and security of its people.

That is the objective that the House should share. We should share the idea that the only long-term prospect is to make Afghanistan more capable of providing for the security and stability of its country to a point where all foreign troops can leave and all of us can get out and come home. As an alliance, how do we do that in a way that is effective and that respects the profound will of the House that our troops not be asked to engage in further combat post-2011?

Business of Supply

I happen to think that what has been proposed is not perfect. I have some questions about it and some issues with it that I want to discuss, but, for my part, it is not a credible position for the Government of Canada to take to say that after 10 years we will not allow a single military personnel to stay behind in Afghanistan to do the job that still clearly has to be done and which we recognize has to be done. What kind of a reliable, sensible or thoughtful partner of NATO or of the United Nations would we be if we said no, that we cannot conceivably think of even doing that?

Everyone knows there is a training need. The Minister of National Defence has described it. There are lots of opportunities and ways in which we can help to train and educate. Now, is that the only thing we need to do? Not at all. I continue to say to the government, and will continue to do so, that Canada needs to be as clear a diplomatic and political partner in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, in the reconciliation with Pakistan and in the internal reconciliation that needs to take place in Afghanistan and in Pakistan as we have been a strong military player in the fighting in Afghanistan.

As the Prime Minister and many others have said, there is no military solution. As the Secretary General of the United Nations said in his press conference last week, there is no exclusively military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. It requires far more than that. I happen to believe it requires more on the political side, on the diplomatic side, than the government has yet been prepared to do.

I want to clarify a rumour that has been spreading around the Internet and even today on the Internet. I want to make it clear that this is not a job application on my part in any way, shape or form. I have not been offered work nor would I accept work from the government. I am not interested in doing it. That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about putting the best of our diplomatic skills at work for Canada to ensure we are as effective a force for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan and Pakistan and between those two countries as we have been on the battlefield and as we have been in the field of development.

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the whole world. It is a country that has been through 30 years of civil war. It is a country whose infrastructure has been destroyed. It is a country where whole generations have never been to school and never received any education. It is a country that has a narco-economy, of which we are all familiar, where the narcotics economy is equal to at least half of the total GDP of the country. It is a country that is a dangerous and violent place.

I heard my colleague from Saint-Jean clearly say that he has been to the funerals. Frankly, we have all been. It is tragic, terrible and horrendous to see, not only the loss of life but the loss of limb and the deep trauma that comes with battle and with fighting.

• (1125)

One thing we have to understand about the world we are in today is that Afghanistan is not the only place we face conflicts or are going to face them. I do not say this as somebody who relishes conflict. I do not say this as someone who in the slightest bit celebrates war or thinks that somehow war is a great or cleansing experience for countries to go through. There have been many

politicians over the generations who have had such strange ideas, but I am not one of those people.

We do have to understand that, in this kind of violent world in which we live, there are corners of extremism that have been allowed to fester and there are states that are not able to effectively control their jurisdictions. The world is getting smaller, where people can get on planes and move, where ideas can move across the Internet, hateful ideas, ideas that continue to advocate the genocide of a people, ideas that continue to advocate the genocide and the elimination of an entire state, the state of Israel.

These are the events and these are the times. This is the moment in which we are living. It is a dangerous and risky peace.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Saint-Jean has spoken of peacekeeping missions. But do any such peacekeeping missions exist where there is no conflict? One cannot talk about keeping the peace in Somalia or eastern Congo when wars there have wiped out 6 million people. Such is the reality of our world.

This is not easy. We are all politicians and we know what people think about this issue. They are telling us that enough is enough, that our troops have been there long enough and it is time to bring them back to Canada. Like my colleagues, I have been elected to the House. I am familiar with the people's opinion. But what poses a problem, in my view, is that I see a world where Canada has no choice but to get involved, eliminate the sources of violence in the world, eliminate the potential for a great many deaths and, indeed, eliminate the possibility of consequences even worse than those that now exist.

[*English*]

I am not one of those people who says we were simply there in Afghanistan to kill the bad guys. I am not one of those who thinks there was ever a military solution.

I find it ironic that, for the longest time, I was described as un-Canadian by some members opposite because I advocated very strongly for the need for us to be engaged in the process of trying to create a basis for peace and the resolution of conflict alongside the military presence.

Now that I am saying we still have a job to do to train as well as do the peace and reconciliation and do the development, all of a sudden now people say, "Oh, the Liberals are suddenly going along with the Conservatives".

That is not how I see things. I must confess that is not how I see it. I see it as the duty of a member of Parliament from time to time to speak his mind to his colleagues and to members opposite. It is our duty to try to understand the fact that, when we look at how we are going to deal with the situation involving not only the security of Afghanistan but the safety and security of Canadians and the safety and security of people all over the world, we have an obligation not simply to see this as a matter of partisan interest but to see this as a question of national interest.

Business of Supply

There have been many commentators from the left and from the right over the last 10 days who have said, “The Liberal Party has made a colossal political mistake”, because we have allowed a tactical advantage to members from other parties to come along our side and to take all those of our supporters who perhaps have concerns about what has been going on in Afghanistan and would like things to change more quickly.

I want to simply say to those people and to all those reporters who have made those comments, and to all those who still harbour those thoughts, that this is not about partisan advantage. We do not start talking about Afghanistan by saying that we want to do a tranche count of the electorate, that we want to see how we can cut up the electorate so we can appeal to this portion over that portion.

That is not how I saw World War II. That is not how I have seen Korea. That is not how I have seen any conflict in which we were engaged as a country. I have had issues with the government's trying to suggest from time to time that, because we are concerned about the way in which things have happened or the way things have been conducted or have not been done, somehow we are unpatriotic in expressing those concerns.

Just as I do not accept that criticism, I do not accept for a moment the notion that somehow this is a great issue on which to divide the Canadian people and on which to try to say how can we reap partisan advantage from the challenge we face.

The combat mission is coming to an end. Let us get a grip here. We are not talking about a combat mission. We are talking about Canadians withdrawing from fighting. Do not think for a moment that all of our NATO allies are thrilled with that proposition, because they are not.

We then said we would participate in training; we will participate in colleges, staff colleges and building up the capacity. Yes we need to do more on the aid side.

I say to my colleague from Ottawa Centre: Am I satisfied with the aid package coming forward from the government? No, I am not. Do I think it is generous enough? No, I do not. Do I see huge health care needs and huge education needs and huge needs to deal with the governance crisis, and do I think what the government has put forward is adequate? No, I do not.

However that is not a basis upon which I am prepared to say that I do not support having a number of troops left behind in Kabul to do the training that is required, under the conditions that have clearly been set out and established by the parliamentary resolution, which if I may say so, this party had a hand in crafting.

Why would we not have a hand in crafting it? This mission goes beyond partisanship.

I was with my colleagues from the Conservative Party, from the Bloc and from the New Democratic Party, and my good friend from St. John's East. We saw together what we saw in Afghanistan in June. We saw the way in which Canadian troops worked. We saw the way in which Canadian civilians worked. We saw the way in which the Afghan army responded. We were all at the same meetings. We received the same briefings.

None of us could have come away from that experience and said that it looked as though it was going to be wrapped up in 2011. What was the expression we heard about the Taliban? “You've got the watches; we've got the time.”

The terrorists do not have a timetable. The terrorists do not have resolutions that say this is what has to happen and this is the day we have to do this and we have to do that.

• (1130)

The terrorists have a different objective, and we need to understand that as a House. Canadians have to come to terms with the need for this continuing engagement; they have to come to terms with the need for us to stay involved and stay engaged, not at the expense of our own people, not at the expense of our democratic traditions and not at the expense of how we do business as a country, but as partners.

I will always remember the Afghan colonel who said to us at a meeting that Canadians are different, that Canadians are not imperialists and are not there as occupiers; Canadians are there as partners.

Our role in partnership is changing. It should change. It is time for it to change. I was a strong advocate for that change, publicly and privately, and I am frankly proud that I was able to be. I continue to believe that Canada's role in partnership and in leadership in Afghanistan is ultimately going to do us far better as a country than any of the alternatives that have been proposed by some of my colleagues in the House.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my friend for a very eloquent and insightful speech on the history not just of the mission but in fact of numerous conflicts in which, as he so rightly put it, partnerships indeed trumped partisanship.

I want to very sincerely give my friend the opportunity to perhaps, in that same spirit, expand on his references to how Canada can continue to build greater capacity on the diplomatic side, on some of the ongoing development and reconstruction that we have undertaken, knowing full well that this is very much about creating the conditions and enabling all of those important things to happen under the umbrella of security.

While training will continue to play a central role in keeping that fragile status of stability, how does the member propose that we as a government, as a country with a very engaged public service, civilian and military, continue to create that atmosphere?

Given the very complex nature, the tribal nature, the dangerous neighbourhood that is Afghanistan, how does the member, in a concrete way, propose that we make greater effort in the area of diplomacy and capacity-building for the Afghanistan government, which faces huge challenges, honestly, of corruption and inadequacy in many departments?

What would the member propose, in a concrete way, that the government do in that vein?

Business of Supply

● (1135)

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I must confess that is the first time a member of the government has ever asked me that question. I am somewhat taken aback but I will try to answer.

The first thing I would do in terms of the machinery of government at home is that I would not have three or four different task forces on Afghanistan and Pakistan. I would have one. I would insist that CIDA, the Department of National Defence, DFAIT and PCO all work together, that they bring their work together into one major task force.

I would have that task force headed up by a senior ambassador. I would make that ambassador responsible for the task force. I would make that ambassador responsible for coordinating our work in Afghanistan and in Pakistan.

Although I know that there may be some noses out of joint as a result of that, I think it is important that it be done.

We have to have a maximum political, aid and military presence, frankly, that matches that same work that is being done by our NATO allies. We cannot lose ground because we have stopped doing combat. We have to make sure our presence is still assured there.

I am sure the minister will share my perspective. I think the key political problem is that we are not going to find a solution in Afghanistan until we do far more to reconcile issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

I have not had a single meeting in Afghanistan or Pakistan where the other party was not essentially held responsible for much of the underlying difficulties in the conflict. I think we have to come to terms with that far more than we have.

I think we have to be very careful that in changing the presence in Kandahar the way we are, which I think is right in terms of where we need to focus our attention anew, we do not lose the continuity of our aid commitment.

I think there are a lot of aid projects that we have started, and we have to make sure we complete what we set out to do. We have to make sure we have sufficient funds to do something that continues to be significant in Afghanistan and that the funds do not simply get dribbled away in a lot of projects that do not end up adding up to a very substantial presence.

I certainly hope that the House committee, although we have had our differences, will be able to get back and look at this question. I think it is very important for members to continue to have access to Afghanistan and visit the country. We have had great difficulty doing that. I think the more often we are able to do that, the more effective our advice will be to the government as we go forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent presentation. There may be many issues we disagree on, but I have always greatly admired how he articulates his thoughts, as well as the passion and emotion with which he delivers his speeches. I also consider him as a friend at committee, and I would respectfully submit to him that it might happen from time to time that we cannot agree on things. This is

happening in a democratic arena, and I am happy that it takes place here.

Rick Hillier's statement was made two weeks ago, one day before the government's position was made public. According to him, providing training without accompanying trainees on the theatre of operations is almost impossible.

Does my colleague think that every effort has been made to try to develop a plan of action designed to deal with the fundamental issue of Afghanistan as it is now?

What we are seeing, which is something we found disappointing on the part of the Liberal Party at the time, is the constant introduction of the military aspect. The solution is always to send more troops. In that sense, I personally feel that we are departing from Mr. Pearson's liberal philosophy of looking for solutions other than military. Since 2007, and still today, we can see that the solution applied is primarily a military one.

I want to know if it is not somewhat of a problem to depart from the philosophy of the peacekeepers and that of Mr. Pearson.

● (1140)

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that there are many who would like to be the sons of Lester Pearson, and I think that I can claim to be at least as much Mr. Pearson's grandson as any other in this House.

We will not speak of his legacy, but I will say two things. First, I never thought that there could be an exclusively military, or even predominantly military, solution in Afghanistan. And I am certain that this is still not the case.

By the same token, there is violence and there are terrorists. This is a fact. I know no other words to describe the Taliban who would attack both civilian and military forces alike. The ability to respond to violence with some degree of force must be an option. I could quote the words of Lester Pearson in this regard, for that was also his point of view. Was there a military solution in Korea? No, there was not. Who was the Minister of External Affairs throughout the entire duration of the Korean War? It was Lester Pearson. Who was the architect of the UN's position that aggression must be resisted, and who thought that the attack against South Korea was a show of aggression and that the UN had an obligation to respond to ensure our collective security? Again, it was Lester Pearson.

There are many things that I could say about Mr. Pearson. He was one of the great minds behind the notion of collective security and the creation of the UN's ability to respond to genuine aggression by other nations.

The September 11 attacks were a watershed moment. The member understands that, I know. It was no one's conspiracy. It was an attack led by al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda has never denied responsibility for that terrible event. It is difficult to conceive of a response to an act of such violence that does not take into account the fact that the government—a Taliban-led government—gave safe haven and even support to al-Qaeda. That government could not be allowed to continue to govern. The meaning of the UN resolution was clear and—

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Ottawa-Centre has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to listen to my colleague from Toronto Centre. There was a lot of explanation in his speech about the position Liberals were taking as party. It is important to note that this view is not shared with everyone in his party. We witnessed that yesterday in committee when his colleague, the former leader of the party, suggested, after hearing evidence, the training was not necessarily the priority.

NATO, the Pentagon, et cetera, are saying they are going to meet the goal of training 171,500 troops next year, yet we have not met our goals on development to date, be it on teacher training at the schools and especially on diplomacy, an area about which he is very concerned. We have stated that an eminent persons group needs to get diplomacy moving, but according to the government, no money has been tagged for that.

Would the member explain how he can support this kind of position when it will come at such a high cost?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the argument about aid and diplomacy is over yet. I think there is a lot of room for persuasion in this Parliament. There is a lot of room for discussing with the government what else needs to be done and why it needs to be done.

The member asks if the glass half full or half empty or how terrible is the glass. I take the position that I do not have a theological or political objection to having soldiers doing training and education in Afghanistan, and I have never had an objection to it. It is part of our ongoing work. I do not think we should draw the line and say that the Afghans can have a nurse, or a doctor, or a policeman or a retired RCMP officer, but they cannot have one single soldier doing human rights work in the training of the Afghan army. That is a ridiculous proposition.

An equally ridiculous proposition is the one that all kinds of civilian work can be going on in Afghanistan without having the necessary security being provided to people. That is equal nonsense. It is a position that I cannot sustain or support.

Am I happy with the amount of the aid package? No. Am I happy with all the efforts that are being done on peace and diplomacy? No. However, that does not take away from the fact that I think it is important for us to have the flexibility to respond to the needs of Afghanistan and, yes, to the needs of our partners in NATO and in the United Nations.

•(1145)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like the previous speaker, I want to acknowledge the announcement by the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, my friend and former long-time law colleague, Danny Williams, on his decision to step down as premier. As most hon. members know, he has been a very strong force for the advancement of Newfoundland and Labrador. He is a very strong leader and has accomplished much in his seven years as the premier, and I will comment about that later.

A lot of Canadians are wondering why we are here on an opposition challenging the government's unilateral decision to extend the military mission in Afghanistan. It is because Canadians were promised a number of things by the government, starting when it sought to be in power in 2006 under the leadership of the current Prime Minister. The Conservatives promised that all foreign military engagements would be put to a vote in Parliament. That was said when they ran for office.

The second thing Canadians were promised was that we would no longer continue a military mission in Afghanistan after 2011. That was the vote of Parliament. We only have to go to the Prime Minister's words on this issue, which he gave in January and again in June when he said that the government could not have been more clear, that the military mission would end and all of our soldiers would be out of Afghanistan by the end of 2011.

Lest there be any doubt, the people in charge of the military said the same thing. The Chief of the Defence Staff, Walter Natynczyk, was at the defence committee on December 9, 2009. He was asked specific questions. He was there to tell us how the troops would be withdrawn and what the military would do. General Natynczyk talked about the motion of Parliament. There was some question about Kandahar versus the rest of Afghanistan, et cetera, which we are still hearing today as a way of trying to climb down from that motion, saying it was about a combat mission.

This is what he was asked by a member of the committee:

There is a difference between Kandahar and Afghanistan. Could you assure us that, in 2011, Canadian soldiers will be repatriated to Canada, and not just from Kandahar?

General Walter Natynczyk answered:

First, it is clear that the mission in Kandahar will end for all troops and, second, it is the end of the military mission in Afghanistan.

It was very clear from General Natynczyk and from the comments of the Prime Minister in January and June.

What do we have today? In the last two weeks the Prime Minister said that he did not really mean military engagements, that he meant combat engagements. The Conservatives are saying that the motion was about Kandahar not about Afghanistan. If some person in Parliament had said in 2008, when we voted on that motion, that it would amount to a permanent military mission in Afghanistan, he or she would have been laughed out of Parliament. That individual would have been told that he or she was imagining things and that we were talking about the extension of our military mission only to 2011.

How do we know that? If we go back to the comments that were made as early as 2006 and in 2008, it was very clear the Conservatives were talking about any mission involving Canadian troops.

•(1150)

It is not new for Parliament to want to have a say in what goes on with Canadian military interventions. The member for Toronto Centre started with a discussion about 1939 and talked about Great Britain. I want to go back to 1923 and Canada.

Business of Supply

In 1923, Prime Minister Mackenzie King declared that only Parliament should ultimately decide on Canadian participation in foreign conflicts. He said:

It is for Parliament to decide whether or not we should participate in wars in different parts of the world, and it is neither right nor proper for any individual nor for any groups of individuals to take any step which in any way might limit the rights of Parliament in a matter which is of such great concern to all the people of our country.

That is how far back I can produce a definite statement about Parliament needing to have a say in this, and there have been many attempts over the years to increase that say. It happened in the 1980s and the 1990s where private members' bills were brought by members who now sit opposite.

The current Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities introduced a private member's bill that called for the necessity for Parliament to approve any peacekeeping mission under UN engagements of over 100 troops. He said that must be brought to Parliament.

Another Reform member of Parliament, Bob Mills, brought forward a similar private member's motion.

The Auditor General has spoken about the need for Parliament to have a say in matters involving foreign engagements and expenditure of these kinds of funds. So this is not new.

In fact, in 2005, there was an agreement among the Conservative Party of Canada, led by the current Prime Minister, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP to change the Standing Orders to allow for votes in Parliament specifically on military engagements abroad. None of this is very new, but in the execution this time we see the government breaking its promise.

Canadians expected Canadian troops to be out. The motion says we will get out. The understanding of it is that we will get out. Canadians want us to end our military engagement in Afghanistan.

The government says it is only a training mission. Let us go back in history. In 2006, the then minister of defence, who is the current government whip, said:

A two-year commitment will allow the additional time needed for Afghan security forces to become operationally effective.

He was saying two years were needed to help them become operationally effective. In other words, a training mission was what it was then.

The member for Toronto Centre made a terrifically eloquent speech back then. He was not in Parliament at the time, but I believe he was seeking the leadership of his party. He said that if he had a chance to vote, he would have voted against it.

In 2006, the extension for two years was supposedly for a short period of time, to allow a transition for Afghanistan itself. The current Prime Minister, when he presenting his motion to extend the war until 2009, said:

This mission extension, if the motion is passed, will cover the period from February 2007 to 2009 when we expect a transition of power in Afghanistan itself.

So we have been down this road before, starting in 2006 and then in 2008 when the mission was extended once again. In 2006, the mission was sold to Canadians as a short-term one that would allow

the Kandaharis, the people of Afghanistan and its military to look after themselves. In 2006, we believed there was a better way. We thought Canadian resources should be directed to helping this then-failed state rebuild itself from the ashes of the civil wars of the 1990s and the disastrous rule of the Taliban.

New Democrats wanted to focus on nation-building. We believed that was the way that Canada should expand its resources. It was a serious situation in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the largest player, the United States, which was attacked, after all, by al-Qaeda out of Afghanistan, explicitly rejected nation-building in Afghanistan as a foreign policy objective and instead turned its attention and resources to a war with Iraq, which amongst other things, of course, as we have seen, served to increase, not diminish, the strength of al-Qaeda in that region.

● (1155)

Who knows what a dedicated focus on Afghan nation-building, which we supported at the time and wanted Canada to focus on, serious international diplomatic and foreign policy efforts to engage the neighbourhood, in particular Pakistan, and to help them create a stable Afghanistan and create one out of the ashes, might have accomplished in the last 10 years? We do not know. However, we do know and we can be certain that the results would have been better than they are today.

In 2008, once again, when we were asked to extend the mission, the focus, the discussion and the quotations from members supporting this mission were all about training: we have to have training in Afghanistan; we want to train the Afghan army; we want to train those troops.

We have a whole series of quotes from the current leader of the Liberal Party in regard to this and his support for it because it was a training mission, all about putting the Afghan people in charge of their own affairs militarily and providing security.

In Afghanistan, that is what we have been engaged in, but has it been successful? The answer to date is "clearly not".

We are opposed to the extension of this military mission in Afghanistan. We believe the expenditure of Canadian money and effort in Afghanistan militarily has been done and Canadians think it is a significant contribution to our NATO partners and to the people of Afghanistan on the military side.

Business of Supply

What are we seeing now? We are seeing a unilateral decision by government to extend this mission militarily, at an admitted cost of \$1.6 billion. At the same time, in terms of the nation-building that the member for Toronto Centre so eloquently talked about, I am shocked that he is not saying that we should take this money, this effort and these resources that are being expended on the military and use it for nation-building, because that is what is going to save the Afghan people. He might grumble, but he is not saying that. Instead, he is supporting the expenditure of five times as much on the military than on nation-building, which is so desperately required in Afghanistan.

However, I do not want to make a speech in the House without talking about what we have done and what we have accomplished. We do not want to take away, in any way, from what has been done by Canadian soldiers and civilians working and serving in Afghanistan.

I, like every parliamentarian who has gone to Afghanistan, have been extremely impressed with the dedication, commitment and professionalism of our troops, our support staff and our top-notch diplomatic personnel, who are doing a very good job, including the current ambassador, Mr. William Crosbie.

All Canadians owe them a debt of gratitude for their service and willingness to serve and to take the risks that they have taken and risk their lives and their future in doing so. We can all be proud of them as Canadians.

Sadly, too many Canadians, soldiers and their families have paid a huge price, including, of course, the 152 deaths that we have suffered, and we wish to honour their sacrifice.

The debate here today is about what Canada will do now, not necessarily what NATO will do. NATO has made a decision. It has a \$1 billion per month budget for military training. But what should Canada do? What should we contribute? How should we honour the sacrifice that has been made?

We say that we should do something that is going to have lasting, permanent effect on the future of Afghanistan. We say, bring home our soldiers and make our contribution to Afghanistan in other ways.

What we have before us is a government that once again sells a training mission to Canadians, and sadly, cuts by more than half its aid and support for aid and development in Afghanistan. It says it will be \$1.6 billion in terms of forces and \$300 million for aid and assistance.

• (1200)

What is really needed in Afghanistan, of course, is aid and assistance to have a strong government that has the respect of the people. What do we have instead? We have in Afghanistan a government that the international transparency watch organization, in its corruption perception index, sees as tied for 176 out of 178 countries in the world for corruption. It is a government that is not respected by the people of Afghanistan and cannot have the respect without a significant amount of long-term work being done in that country.

In fact, that government is held in so much disrespect and disdain by the Canadian government that we had the Prime Minister in

Lisbon saying that we will not dispense a dime to the Government of Afghanistan unless we are convinced the money will be spent in the way it is intended to be spent.

We had that confirmed yesterday by the officials from the Afghanistan task force, saying in regard to aid money that none of this \$100 million over three years, which is grossly inadequate to do a significant job, will go to the Government of Afghanistan.

The irony of this is a bit shocking. We are saying that we do not trust that government with a dime of our money but we are prepared to give them an army. We are prepared to train and develop a force of up to 300,000 combined police and security officers and hand it over to that government that we do not trust with a dime of our money. That is what we are saying.

The irony of that should not be lost on the Canadian public, because that is what the government is saying.

The only long-term solution for Afghanistan has to be in the desire, will and ability of the people to have some control of their own affairs, at the local level through the kind of work that we have been doing and support for women. We have women's organizations in Afghanistan that are in desperate need of money and support for projects. We have had very successful programs, such as the national solidarity program, which has been effectively delivering programs and projects to communities, decided by them at local shuras as to what the leadership and the communities want and delivering those programs to the people. They are extremely successful programs, the kinds of things that give people confidence in their future and make them want to have control over their own country.

Support for literacy programs, education and rural electrification are the kinds of things that will help that country become more literate. We are doing things in education and I think all Canadians should be proud of that.

But why are we cutting our aid support in half? If we are only able to contribute the amount of money that is being offered, why are we not putting it all into something that will have long-term nation-building support?

I am talking Canada now. There are lots of other members in NATO and I am not talking about NATO's goals. I am talking about what Canadians want and should contribute to the people of Afghanistan in the coming years.

It should not be a one-, two- or three-year commitment. We should recognize that if we want to make the full commitment to the Afghan people based on our years of effort and sacrifice on the military side, which we have done and which Canadians expected from the motion to be over, we should honour that sacrifice and commitment by making a long-term commitment to the people of Afghanistan to help them build the nation that they have to build themselves. They are the ones who have to build that nation and they are the ones who are going to be in charge.

There are a lot of things we could say about Afghanistan. We have had President Karzai telling the Americans that they should be confined to bases and they should not do this and should not do that and the negotiations with the Taliban. All of that will go on and happen regardless of what Canada says or does.

Business of Supply

However, I cannot help but remark on the irony of suggesting that we do not trust the Afghan government with a dime of our money but we are going to give them a fully trained army and let them take over when we get out in 2014. I do not think that is right.

●(1205)

I cannot help but remark on the irony of suggesting that we do not trust the government with a dime of our money, but we are going to give it a fully trained army and let it take over when we get out in 2014. I do not think that is right.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my friend for his insight and remarks.

The member being a proud Newfoundlander and Labradorian, I will take a brief moment to comment on the departure of Premier Williams who clearly will leave an enormous legacy in his province. He is someone who very passionately and very prominently led his province for many years.

I find myself almost a bit frightened by agreeing with so much of what my colleague has just said. While my friend from Toronto Centre made similar remarks, I am even more heartened by his breaking, perhaps, the ideological bondage of his former party and setting out quite clearly that much of the development, reconstruction and progress that we have seen in Afghanistan cannot happen and cannot be sustained in the long term without an adequate security presence and forces on the ground.

That is very much the transformation that has occurred in the mission. We are now focusing on the training so that we will not lose ground, so we will not see Afghanistan tumble back the way it has in previous times, the way another country, without putting too fine a point on it, such as Haiti for different reasons also fell back when the international community cast its gaze away from its troubles and tribulations.

How does the member divorce the essential ingredient of security from the continuation and perpetration of further progress in education, the vaccination of children, the furtherance of governance, democracy building, economy building, all of that absolutely critically important progress, the very essence of the mission, having to have those things occur under the umbrella of security?

This is a spectrum of development that will take years. I think the Prime Minister, the foreign affairs minister and others in the House would clearly see that this is a mission that will require attention beyond the military participation, well beyond 2014.

How does the member separate somehow the progress that has been made and the protection of the gains that we have made from the continued participation in some military training?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his comments about my friend and former law partner and colleague, Danny Williams. He has done a tremendous job for Newfoundland and Labrador.

On the point that the minister made, I would ask him in return, how can he and his government divorce themselves from the promise to end the mission in 2011 and to bring military engagements to the House of Commons?

On the substance of the point, we are talking about what Canada will do in the next three to ten years in Afghanistan. What we are saying is what Canada should do. Instead of spending five times as much on military as is spent on aid, as is being proposed by the government, or I should say decided by the government, because it has decided that it is going to impose it regardless of the will of Parliament and without bringing it to a vote, and instead of cutting our aid support in half, we should be multiplying that three times and trying to accomplish those goals as Canada's contribution, not as NATO. NATO is doing what it is doing.

I am talking about what Canada and Canadians should be doing to honour the sacrifice that has been made by our soldiers and their families and by this country. That is something I think Canadians would want to see happen.

●(1210)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think what my colleague from St. John's East was displaying is that there is a lot of space required for substantive debate and we are just not having that. I am glad we are doing it today.

The defence minister said that it is great we are debating this and that we are going to have a vote. I wish that vote had come from the government, as that was its pledge.

I want to touch on some of the comments that my colleague, our party's defence critic, made around the priorities for the people of Afghanistan. I think that gets forgotten here.

We can talk about troop numbers and we can talk about how many are going to be trained. I mentioned that NATO and the Pentagon had already said that they were going to train the troops on schedule, before we got in the game, before the government broke its promise. What we have not been able to achieve, which the government loves to talk about, is the training of teachers and the building of schools. We have slid even on those numbers. It would seem to me, if we are concerned about supporting the people of Afghanistan in terms of aid development and we want to further stability in the region, that is where we would put our investments.

Why does the member think that the government chose to put all of its eggs into the military and not into investing in diplomacy and aid? In fact, by its own reporting, that is where it is not up to scratch. We are up to scratch in terms of military training according to NATO and the Pentagon, so why the choice for the military over diplomacy and aid?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, it is very difficult to understand that choice, frankly.

As a Canadian who has spent a lot of time in the last while trying to understand what the government does from day to day, I have been appalled by the failure of the Canadian government to act in a responsible and proactive way internationally, and that the fallback position is to do what NATO wants or do what the pressure point is.

Business of Supply

Until June of this year, and even until two weeks ago, the commitment was that we would be out of there, that we would focus on human rights and humanitarian aid. We were rejoicing in our party, frankly. We thought that this was good. We were looking forward to a debate about how we could best accomplish that goal and how many resources we could convince the government to devote to it. We were avidly looking forward to that debate in the Afghanistan committee, but in the blink of an eye, the government unilaterally decided that it was going to extend the military mission and that it was going to commit up to 1,000 personnel.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer said in 2008 that it could cost as much as \$3 billion for a three year mission. The government is saying it will cost half of that. We will see. Instead the government is saying it is going to cut our aid budget from what was \$227 million in 2008-09 down to \$100 million a year for three years.

It is astounding. I cannot account for it and I have not heard an explanation from the government as to why it changed its course, why it dropped the aid and instead decided to focus on a military mission. I am saddened by it, frankly, as a Canadian.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my colleague. However, I feel it necessary to correct the record, and I would like to ask the member a question with regard to the correction of the record.

I would like to read what the resolution in fact was before the House of Commons, because for whatever reason, my colleague has it all wrong. The resolution actually states, “the Government of Canada notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in Kandahar”, not in Afghanistan, as has been repeated many times by my colleague. I repeat that the resolution indicates that the presence of Canada will end in Kandahar, not in Afghanistan as he has repeated numerous times. It states:

...that the Government of Canada, together with our allies...[will] set firm targets and timelines for the training, equipping and paying of the Afghan National Army...

I would like to give my colleague an opportunity to apologize for misleading the House and for misleading Canadians about the resolution. I would like his response.

●(1215)

Mr. Jack Harris: Once again, Madam Speaker, the hon. member is trying to re-write history. The motion does talk about a military presence in Kandahar as one of the specifics, but after talking about that, it says that it is the opinion of the House, “that, consistent with this mandate, this extension of Canada’s military presence in Afghanistan is approved by this House expressly on the condition that” and there are a whole series of conditions.

It talks specifically about a combat role in Kandahar, but it also talks about an extension of the military mission to 2011 and 2011 only. That is consistent with what the current Leader of the Opposition said at that time, “The Liberal Party is opposed to renewing the mission beyond 2011”. If he believed that at the time, there would have been a necessity for an amendment. There was not, because it was understood at the time that the military mission as a whole would end in 2011.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my speaking time with the member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher.

We would not be here today debating this motion if the government had kept its word. What this government is doing is showing its contempt for parliamentary democracy, as it has done so well since it came to power. According to the Prime Minister, a vote in Parliament is not necessary for extending the mission of the Canadian troops in Afghanistan. On this he is contradicting himself, because in the 2007 Speech from the Throne, this very Prime Minister said that “our Government has made clear to Canadians and our allies that any future military deployments must also be supported by a majority of parliamentarians.”

We, the Bloc Québécois members of this House, demand that a vote be held on this crucial question. The federal government absolutely must obtain authorization from Parliament before deploying troops abroad, because excluding parliamentarians, the people’s elected representatives, amounts to a denial of democratic principles.

With no debate and with no vote in the House, the Canadian government has decided to maintain a presence in Kabul consisting of 950 troops, who will have responsibility for training the Afghan security forces. The government wants to sound reassuring, by saying that the members of the Canadian Armed Forces who remain in Afghanistan will not take part in combat missions. But how can he claim to know the future and to be sure that the insurgents will draw a bright line between the peaceful role of the Canadian Armed Forces and the offensive troops?

The Conservatives are contradicting themselves. In early 2010, the Prime Minister and members of his government declared that Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan would end in 2011 and Canadian involvement would be limited to development, governance, humanitarian assistance and training police. But now, in spite of everything it said in the past, the government is changing its tune and deciding to maintain a military presence in Afghanistan without consulting the public or their elected representatives.

The strategy the Conservatives have discovered for getting out of this, at least for avoiding a vote, is the discovery of the century. They are inventing a new type of mission, a non-combat mission. What is a non-combat mission? I happen to believe that there are two types of missions: military missions and peacekeeping missions. The Conservatives have become experts in semantic game-playing, a bright idea for evading the rules of this House and for not calling a vote.

In addition, the Prime Minister and his Minister of Foreign Affairs are becoming even more confrontational with the opposition, contending that all Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan will be brought home by March 2014 at the latest. Once again, a promise they cannot keep and a commitment they cannot honour. They truly have no credibility and the public is not fooled.

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The Liberal Party members are also complicit in the extension of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. In 2006, when there was a vote on extending the mission, it was the votes of several Liberal members that made it possible for the mission to be extended until 2009. In 2008, the Conservatives introduced a motion, amended by the Liberals, to extend the mission to 2011. Once again, the Liberals lined up with the Conservatives. We can see that they have the same vision and the same philosophy.

Canada can bring a lot to the Afghan people. While the Bloc Québécois feels that Canada has done more than its share militarily and that other allied countries can perhaps take over its role, we believe that Canada can get involved at a number of other levels.

Canadian police officers are renowned the world over. The Bloc Québécois therefore recommends sending a contingent of up to 50 police officers to provide training to Afghan police. The presence of a trained, equipped, legitimate police force may help reduce the lack of security of the Afghan people.

According to all reports, there are major deficiencies in the Afghan prison system, as is clear from the issue of Afghan detainees abused in Afghan jails.

•(1220)

According to NATO:

To western standards, conditions of many detention/correction facilities vary from inadequate to extremely poor in some places.

As a result, the Bloc Québécois is suggesting that the wardens of Afghan prisons receive support from Canadian assistant wardens. We are therefore recommending sending 50 civilians from the Canadian prison system.

Trust in the legal system is one of the bases of a lawful society. NATO revealed that:

The Afghans prize the system's notion of "fairness" and prefer the use of the informal system, as the formal governmental system is perceived as highly corrupt.

To provide training for the Afghan legal system and to ensure that it functions properly, the Bloc Québécois proposes sending a delegation of Canadian legal experts who can help with the modernization of the legal system. The Bloc Québécois also believes that Canada must continue its official development assistance in Afghanistan and feels that the Minister of International Cooperation's announcement to reduce the ODA envelope by more than half from 2011 to 2014 is unacceptable.

As well, the Canadian government and CIDA must review the policy on development aid to Afghanistan. It must be better coordinated, more transparent and efficient. The ODA must also be restructured because, in the past seven years, 80% of international aid bypassed the Afghan government and was not strictly in line with this government's priorities.

We are here today to vote on a motion that condemns the government's decision to unilaterally extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan until 2014. That is the Conservative way, and it has not changed since they came to power. Canada's foreign policy has shifted to the right, and we no longer hear about the 3D approach: development, defence and diplomacy. The government's three priorities now are security, prosperity and governance. The

government dictates Canada's foreign policy in keeping with its economic and military priorities.

It allocates exorbitant amounts to defence and peanuts to development assistance. The Conservatives' diplomatic record is abysmal. It is no wonder this government lost its seat on the UN Security Council as a direct result of its foreign policy. But Canada enjoys a good reputation within NATO, which is understandable because NATO is a military alliance. Canada has invested heavily in military procurement for the past few years.

The Conservatives' militaristic policy is not in line with Quebecers' values. The vast majority of Quebecers are opposed to Canada's presence in Afghanistan.

According to a Harris/Decima poll conducted during the week of November 11, 59% of respondents in Quebec think Canada should bring all its troops home, and only 36% want the Canadian army to help train Afghan soldiers.

Clearly, the Conservative members from Quebec are out of touch with their constituents' concerns and are not standing up for their interests within this government.

I will close by inviting all the members of the House to vote for our motion, because any deployment of Canadian troops must be subject to a vote in the House of Commons.

•(1225)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to both the Bloc and the NDP talk about development aid for Afghanistan. They do not seem to look at the whole of Canada's approach. They just pick on little niggly things and say that aid should go there and forget everything else.

Afghanistan is not a normal country. It has no security and it is run by one of the worst kinds of insurgents in the world, the Taliban. I am not really interested in the kind of development that Canada has been doing there.

I find it quite amazing that the Bloc and the NDP get up every time and say that we should remove the security portion out of it and just let things run by themselves and that we are very much welcomed over there. I have no idea who will provide that security.

To say that Canada should provide development assistance and everything and expect other countries to provide security for this is a very irresponsible attitude.

Talking and listening in Parliament, we are already debating this thing and there will be a vote after this in which the hon. member can express the voting right that she is talking about.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments, but I want to remind him what today's motion is about.

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What we are criticizing is the fact that his government disregarded our parliamentary responsibilities. The Prime Minister committed and even promised the members of this House that there would be a vote if the mission in Afghanistan were to be extended or transformed. What we see now is that the government took advantage of our absence to announce that it was extending the mission in Afghanistan to 2014.

We were elected to represent the Canadian public. We are talking about taxpayers' money. This kind of decision is not legitimate unless Parliament is consulted. That is what we are demanding with this motion, that the House be consulted and that there be a vote on the Conservative government's decision.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this motion on this Bloc Québécois opposition day. I would first like to read out the motion:

That this House condemn the government's decision to unilaterally extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to 2014, whereby it is breaking two promises it made to Canadians, one made on May 10, 2006, in this House and repeated in the 2007 Throne Speech, that any military deployment would be subject to a vote in Parliament, and another made on January 6, 2010, that the mission in Afghanistan would become a strictly civilian commitment after 2011, without any military presence beyond what would be needed to protect the embassy.

On this issue, the Bloc Québécois cannot support the government, its policies or its decisions. That explains why we oppose extending the Canadian mission.

The Conservative government wants us to be involved in a never-ending war on terror. This is no longer the aftermath of September 11. We have moved on. The government seems to think that the world can conquer terrorism simply by using force and that the best way to respond to what happened on September 11 is by using weapons. It is mistaken.

The best way to put an end to terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world is first to give hope to those who have none. This has been the Bloc Québécois position for years and it is the only position that reflects Quebec's values and interests.

The Bloc Québécois is of the opinion that, militarily, Canada has done its share and that its role can be taken over by our allies. Although we do not agree with the form the mission has taken, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the military men and women who have taken part in the mission and pay tribute to the memory of those who have lost their lives there. We honour the sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice, that they have made.

With respect to the Conservatives' plan to extend the military mission, the government is straying, in my view, from what its role should be. It should be participating in the reconstruction by providing financial and humanitarian support to recognized NGOs on the ground, not by providing a military presence now masquerading as a training mission that is a complete sham.

According to the Prime Minister, the mission is being extended solely in order to train Afghan soldiers. But the former chief of the defence staff, General Rick Hillier, stated that it is impossible to train soldiers without following up in the field, meaning in conflict situations. So it seems clear that the so-called "new" mission in Afghanistan will not be humanitarian in nature, as the Prime Minister would have us believe. Instead, it will be military in nature,

with Canadian soldiers having to go into combat zones in order to do their work.

The government is trying to justify keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan by claiming that they will not be involved in combat. The example of France shows that it is impossible to conduct training without becoming involved in combat missions. France has lost about fifty soldiers, a good number of them while training the Afghan army.

What is more, at the very recent NATO summit, the Prime Minister had the audacity to promise not to extend the mission in Afghanistan past 2014. But on January 6, 2010, he stated publicly that there would be no military presence in Afghanistan after 2011 beyond what would be needed to protect the Canadian embassy.

● (1230)

How much credibility does he have in setting this new 2014 deadline when, in so doing, he is going back on his promise to withdraw the troops in 2011? Who can believe him?

After having extended Canada's military mission in Afghanistan four years beyond the original deadline, the Prime Minister is now forcing his decision to continue it beyond 2011 on the House by sending about 1,000 troops until 2014. The Conservative government also deliberately announced this arbitrary decision, made hurriedly and on the sly, during the parliamentary recess and therefore without any debate or vote in the House of Commons.

The Prime Minister broke his promise not to extend the military mission in Afghanistan, and in so doing, he lost all further credibility. In May 2006, the Prime Minister repeated the promise his government made during the election campaign to hold a vote on any further deployment of troops overseas. The Prime Minister should have kept this promise at the very least by holding a debate and a vote in the House on the extension of the mission in Afghanistan beyond 2011. That is why the Bloc Québécois wanted to have this debate today on an opposition day.

There is no way that an agreement made behind closed doors between the Conservatives and Liberals on the extension of the military mission in Afghanistan can substitute for a free and democratic debate. A real debate is needed to ensure that the Afghan mission is really a civilian commitment.

Since this mission started, the Bloc Québécois has been the only party advancing a consistent, responsible position. The Bloc stated that it was in favour of withdrawing our soldiers at the end of the mission and it was consistent enough to vote for the Liberal motion in 2007 that would have ended the mission in 2009, in contrast to the NDP, which supported the extension of the mission under false pretences.

This shows that the Bloc Québécois continues to represent Quebecers and their values in Ottawa. Quebec does not want any more of this military mission. Quebec is against it, and most of all, Quebec wants the Premier Minister to reverse his anti-democratic decision and put an end to the military mission in favour of a civilian, humanitarian mission, as he promised he would do in January 2010.

I therefore encourage all members of the House to support our motion.

•(1235)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech and I would like to ask him a couple of quick questions.

First, he talked about restoring hope. Is bringing education to seven million children restoring hope? Is bringing 7.2 million polio inoculations to children and having 70% of Afghans covered by health care restoring hope? Is it running water? Is it repairing the Dahla Dam to provide electricity and irrigation for Afghan's agricultural economy? Is that restoring hope? I think it is.

He talks about training and he confuses, either because he may not be aware or he does not want to be aware, the difference between operational mentoring training with the army outside the wire and basic training inside the wire where, for the past four years, NATO has been conducting that type of training without a single loss, as Canada will.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Madam Speaker, we would indeed like to see Canada's presence in Afghanistan be more along the lines of the commitments made at some point by the Prime Minister to support the restructuring of civil effort in Afghanistan. This is why we are asking that the NGOs on the ground continue to be provided with financial support and expertise by the Canadian government. We do not agree with the military nature of this mission to be extended supposedly to train the Afghan army.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, on Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index, Afghanistan ties for 176th place out of 178 countries. Just yesterday somebody called my office asking that very question, why we would be supporting a government that rates so high in corruption.

We have spent \$18 billion already on this effort that has produced very questionable results. So I would like to ask the member if he would expand upon that whole issue, on whether or not we should be looking at what we are really doing there, supporting a corrupt government. There are two American military officials, just in the last few days, evidently questioning the same point.

Why would we possibly be supporting putting money into developing an army for a government that rates so high on the corruption index?

•(1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Indeed, Madam Speaker, I think that we are seeing history repeat itself because, in previous wars, support was provided to corrupt local regimes which, at the end of the day, did not support in any real way our action. Instead, we in the Bloc Québécois advocate providing support to the non-governmental organizations on the ground, which are truly looking out for the

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interests of the Afghan people, as opposed to filling the coffers of a corrupt regime which will no doubt end up collapsing on its own.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Kootenay—Columbia.

As we are discussing the future of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan, I believe it is also important to reflect upon what we have achieved through this engagement until now.

Afghanistan is not the place that it once was. As the foreign affairs committee saw this past summer, it is a nation of people with incredible will, courage and resilience. When Canada first became involved in Afghanistan, it had been under the rule of the Taliban, one of the world's most repressive and regressive regimes. Poverty, illiteracy and oppression characterized life for all Afghans and the country had become a safe haven for international terrorists.

This was the situation that existed nearly 10 years ago and it is the starting point from which the accomplishments of Canada and its partners must be assessed. In such circumstances, progress takes time and setbacks are to be expected. Nevertheless, progress is being made and Canada has succeeded in making a difference in the lives of the Afghans. Our government feels strongly that we must continue to build on what we have achieved so far and maintain our commitment to Afghanistan.

This is something we owe to the thousands of remarkable Canadian men and women who have risked their lives, including the 152 members of the Canadian Forces, a diplomat, 2 NGO humanitarian aid workers and journalists who have made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan.

The objective of Canadians was to help Afghans improve their own security, development and governance, both in Kandahar province and in Afghanistan as a whole. No one felt that achieving this objective would be free of obstacles and challenges, but that did not discourage the brave men and women, military and civilians, Canadians and Afghans who give the best of themselves to this noble goal, to provide measurable improvements to the lives of Afghan citizens.

Thanks to their hard work, very significant progress has been achieved with regard to our six priorities and three signature projects. This progress is compiled every quarter in the government's report to Parliament on Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. For each of our six priorities and three signature projects, benchmarks and progress indicators have been established. This gives Parliament and the Canadian public a very clear picture of our achievements to date and of what is left to accomplish in order to achieve our objectives.

No other country reports on established benchmarks like we do. Through quarterly reporting, our government ensures an exceptional level of accountability and transparency.

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I believe it is important to emphasize how much of our accomplishments are in areas that many Canadians take for granted such as access to basic services, to education and health care. Building schools or providing polio vaccines may not sound like the most groundbreaking achievements to the average citizen of a developed country like Canada, but for an Afghan child, it may make the difference between a life of poverty and a life of opportunity, or even between life itself and death. This is what I hope my fellow parliamentarians and my fellow Canadians keep in mind when they reflect upon Canada's contribution in Afghanistan.

Now let me speak about some of our accomplishments in further detail.

Recognizing that Afghans need to build their own capacity to ensure their own security, Canada has worked tirelessly to enable the Afghanistan National Security Forces in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promised law and order. To this end, we are training, mentoring and equipping the Afghan national army and the police, building capacity in administration and logistics support and carrying out complementary initiatives in justice and correctional systems.

With the rule of law comes the ability for citizens to defend and exercise their fundamental rights. Promoting and protecting human rights, including women's rights, is a core element of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. Canada consistently raises human rights issue such as freedom of expression, free speech, gender equality and freedom of media with the government of Afghanistan. We also provide support to build Afghan capacity to ensure that laws are in accordance with its constitution and its international human right obligations and to enable justice sector reform

● (1245)

While we acknowledge that this is a long-term process, we have seen substantial improvements in this area since the beginning of our engagement in the country. For instance, women, who had virtually no rights merely 10 years ago, now represent over a quarter of the Afghan parliamentarians and are taking a more active part in the country's political and economic development.

Perhaps more important is girls now represent a third of school children, compared with none in 2001, ensuring a better life and better opportunities for future generations.

Canada is also fully conscious of the importance of regional dynamics and the need for increased regional co-operation in order to help Afghanistan become a more stable and prosperous country.

With this in mind, since November 2007, Canada has facilitated a series of workshops to enhance mutual understanding and confidence between Pakistani and Afghani officials, which will allow them to undertake targeted joint border management projects.

This effort, known as the Dubai process, brings together border officials to promote co-operation with regard to customs, movement of people, counter narcotics and law enforcement. The most recent Dubai process meetings held in April, July and November were very highly productive.

These are just a few examples of progress.

To Afghans, Canadian accomplishments are more than just numbers and quarterly reports. For many Afghans, this partnership with Canada and the progress we have achieved together means real opportunities, as well as hope for a better future.

We can be proud of what we have achieved, but we must remain aware that our work is not complete. As history has proven time and time again, Canadians do not shy away from challenges. Nor do we back down when faced with difficulties. We must continue to look at the bigger picture and maintain our commitment to the people of Afghanistan.

After all, with all of our experience, through blood and hard work, and the admiration and handicraft of the Afghan, it is the best legacy we can leave behind. The Bloc motion fails to recognize that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me.

These past few years, the people of Quebec and Canada has been unable to understand why the government had turned a blind eye to the whole matter of the torture of detainees in Afghanistan. The government even prorogued Parliament because of that matter which has shocked the Canadian public as a whole.

Now the government wants to avoid putting the future of the mission in Afghanistan to a vote in this House. I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary this: when will this government start showing more transparency and more respect for the democratic will of all members of this House, who represent all the people of Quebec and Canada in this place? When will it show more transparency and a stronger sense of democracy?

● (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Speaker, I alluded to that in my speech. The government has been transparent. It has given quarterly reports. It has had a mandated mission. We are doing exactly what the 2008 motion set out. For the member to say that this is undemocratic is absolutely wrong.

Today we are speaking to that party's motion. Next week, when we vote on this motion, he will find out what the will of the majority of members will be. Let us wait for the vote on the Bloc motion.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am surprised he would suggest that this is in any way transparent. Just a couple of weeks ago the government said that the military mission was done. In fact, at committee yesterday, we heard from Rear Admiral Davidson, who is on the Afghan task force. He said, "we received government direction last week about the change and so we're now in the process of consulting with our allies, in terms of exactly where and in what capacity we can contribute towards".

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We are talking about the mission in Afghanistan. Who was consulted? That is what I want to know from the parliamentary secretary. Clearly the minister of defence was entirely out of the loop. I know he is getting some lines from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence right now. Hopefully they are better than the numbers he gave us at committee, which were wrong. However, clearly no one was in the loop on this.

If our Afghan task force members did not know, and I assume the minister of defence did not know, who actually made this decision and how will it benefit the mission in Afghanistan and, more important, the people of Afghanistan?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Speaker, the member occasionally comes in front of the Afghanistan committee to see what is happening, but his colleague, who is a prominent member of that committee, and ourselves have travelled to Afghanistan. We have seen the mission at hand and we have seen what steps have taken place to improve what has happened. The Prime Minister attended the Lisbon NATO conference. Every country is now looking at how we can improve our mission in Afghanistan.

It is a natural evolutionary process. I do not understand what seems to be the problem. We are going from 2,500 troops to 950 troops. This is a training mission. What is wrong with a training mission? It is the best legacy we can leave for the Afghan people. I fail to understand why the member cannot support that legacy.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Speaker, it gives me great and tremendous pleasure to be a part of this debate today, having had the unique opportunity of being able to go to Afghanistan last June. I participated in a seven-day mission to Kandahar and Kabul as a member of the House of Commons Special Committee on Afghanistan.

The purpose of the trip was to effectively observe the situation facing our troops and aid workers in Afghanistan. Before the trip I had government briefings on the situation, but the media was definitely one of the largest sources of my information on Afghanistan.

A few days after returning, I was at a social event where MPs, senators and the national news media were mingling, and as I walked by some reporters, one of them asked me about my impressions from the trip. I told him, first, I was blown away with the complete enthusiastic dedication of the Canadian soldiers, aid workers and diplomats in Afghanistan. Their selfless commitment is overwhelming. They know what they are doing and they know why they are doing it. Every day they spend in Afghanistan, they are risking their next breath, yet they persevere.

I continued, though. I said that, second, the coverage of Afghanistan by our national news media has been at best inadequate. All Canadians should be proud of our contribution to the world by our Afghan commitments. We should be overwhelmingly, enthusiastically thankful to those who are serving. Instead, we are timid. The news editing mentality of “it bleeds, it leads” is not good enough for these situations because it is overly simplistic and breeds fear.

Regrettably, the news coverage, or lack of it, on Afghanistan has actually distorted the impressions that most Canadians have, or many Canadians anyway. Canadian media coverage of Afghanistan for 10 years has been the equivalent of covering news in Canada and

Canadian events by having three reporters driving around in a Vancouver police cruiser on Vancouver's east side. What would that coverage tell Canadians about Canadians' aspiration or the beauty of our land or our potential? This parallel is appropriate, because news organizations from Canada have had an average of three people in Kandahar, driving around in LAVs or confined to the air base.

Let me tell the House what I saw and how it was very, very moving for me personally. I saw Canadian soldiers, diplomats and people involved in development activity who made my heart want to burst with pride over what we as Canadians were doing for the people in Afghanistan and that part of the world. Take the example of education. Canada has had 26 schools rehabilitated or reconstructed, with another 24 under construction or contracted to be reconstructed. There have been 23,000 Afghan adults completing a 10-month literacy program and 5,900 completing vocational training programs.

These investments are building the future of Afghanistan. Thanks in part to the funding of the international community and the hard work of Afghans themselves, there are now more than 158,000 teachers in Afghanistan, which is up from only 21,000 in 2002.

More than six million Afghans are now getting the education required to help lift their country out of poverty. One-third of these students are girls, compared to none in 2002. These investments will need to be continued over the coming years; therefore the government has already signalled its intention to make the education of Afghan children, especially girls, a thematic priority until 2014.

Regarding health, in 2000, believe it or not, only 9% of the population was within two hours' walking distance of primary health care services. Now 66% are within two hours' walking of primary health care. More than 1,450 health care workers, including doctors, nurses, midwives and community health workers, have received training.

We have also seen reductions in the infant mortality rate, thanks to increased access to health care services and improved quality of and access to emergency obstetric care in southern Afghanistan.

The Canadian signature project to eradicate polio in Afghanistan with investments through the polio eradication initiative has enhanced successes. Canada is currently the largest international donor toward these efforts in Afghanistan.

To date, Afghanistan's estimated 7.8 million children continue to receive vaccinations through multiple vaccination campaigns across the country carried out through the year. While there have been difficulties in accessing populations in order to deliver the vaccinations, the disease has been largely contained to the south.

● (1255)

Persisting insecurity challenges are still there, but despite this, the polio team has devised innovative approaches to extend the reach of immunization efforts. Improving the health of Afghanistan's children underlines the importance of our continued engagement in Afghanistan. We will not waver in this commitment.

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Building on this commitment, our response to the G8 Muskoka initiative on maternal, newborn and child health, through which we will provide \$30 million annually to help address critical gaps in the Afghan health sector, will build upon our investments of the past.

In general terms, thanks in part to Canadian investment, the World Food Programme provided 275,000 tonnes of food to more than nine million Afghans in 2009 alone. Also in 2009, the Government of Canada provided \$20 million in response to the UN-led humanitarian action plan.

Just as crucial for the future of Afghanistan is our commitment to help build the confidence of Kandaharis in their own government in Kandahar. In 2008, the Government of Canada set out specific objectives to help the Kandahar government increase access to basic services and jobs.

The Afghan government has often highlighted the necessity for rural development programming in its country, Afghans' access to economic opportunity. A key goal there for the Government of Canada was to help reinvigorate Kandahar's agro-economy with the rehabilitation of the Dahla Dam, a signature project of this government at \$50 million. Its irrigation system serves as a central building block to Afghans' future.

Once identified as the bread basket of Afghanistan, Kandahar's ability to produce food and crops remains severely weakened by years of conflict and continuous drought. Afghanistan has one of the lowest levels per capita of food ability in the world, due in part to the destruction of these agriculture systems in the Arghandab Valley and across Kandahar.

Kandaharis rely on these agricultural systems not only for sustenance but also for their livelihoods. The destruction of this agricultural system has led to reduced employment opportunities in the agricultural sector, on which 80% of local farmers and labourers are dependent.

Today, thanks to Canada's support and the hard work of Afghans, over 137,000 cubic metres of silt and debris have been removed from the irrigation system's canals. The resulting increased water flow has helped an additional 5,300 hectares of land benefit from improved irrigation. To date, the construction work associated with the canal rehabilitation has helped provide approximately 2,000 jobs to Kandaharis. The additional economic opportunity that Kandaharis will have upon completion of the work on the irrigation system will provide for local populations in the province for future generations to come.

However these are just statistics until we take a look at the face of the Canadians in Afghanistan who are delivering these services. They are making a commitment of their lives on a day-to-day, minute-to-minute basis, which is why I was so overwhelmed when I met them. The honour that the Afghan people give to Canadians who are there to serve is the deep, overwhelming respect they have for the Canadians and for their contributions and connections, person to person, man to man, woman to woman.

Canada's contribution of trainers, which is what we are discussing today, is to give Afghanistan the ability to keep peace. Canada is moving to a peacekeeping mission. I asked the Bloc member this morning if he wanted foreign troops to keep the peace in

Afghanistan or whether we should be training the Afghan army to do the job themselves.

Our government is honouring the commitment of all those who have sacrificed already. I call upon the special committee on Afghanistan to step up and work more constructively to define Canada's contribution for this untold story. Because we have been honoured with that level of respect by the Afghan people, we are in a strategically unique position among citizens of the world to be able to deliver training to these people.

For me, it was an extreme privilege to shake hands with the dedicated Canadians working so diligently, contributing so much, in our armed forces, RCMP, correctional services, CIDA, DFAIT and civilian agencies. To them, I can only say that I thank them.

● (1300)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, every member of the Bloc Québécois respects the troops who are currently in Afghanistan putting their lives on the line to carry out a mission.

Our question is the following. Why did the government promise in its 2006 election campaign to end the mission? The Conservative Prime Minister talked about that several times. The Minister of Foreign Affairs said in the House of Commons that this mission would end in 2011 and that there would be no military presence beyond that date. It was not the Bloc Québécois members, but the Minister of Foreign Affairs who said that.

It was the Conservatives' idea to continue the mission, and the Liberals support them. The only thing the Bloc Québécois wants is for the government to keep its word and for the military mission to be defined and put to a vote in the House. The Bloc Québécois initiated this debate today as part of its opposition day. However, it was the government's responsibility to initiate a debate on extending the mission in Afghanistan.

● (1305)

[English]

Hon. Jim Abbott: Madam Speaker, it is very important to make a clear statement here.

The Government of Canada, along with the rest of the members of this House, made a commitment that the combat troops would be removed from Kandahar in 2011. What we are talking about now is to honour the position that we made, along with the U.S. and other allied soldiers, to be able to move forward to turn over the security of Afghanistan to Afghans. They require training in order to do that. On the mission that I had the privilege to be part of, it was very clear that the Afghans respect Canadians and our ability to be able to train them. They were asking us to do that.

I ask the member the same question that I asked the previous Bloc speaker. Who is going to keep the peace? Are we going to continue to have foreign troops in Afghanistan?

I say no. The people of Afghanistan must have that capacity themselves to keep the peace. Truly this is a peacekeeping mission.

Business of Supply

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the Conservative member for his intervention and his work as parliamentary secretary for that matter.

I have a question for the member, because it is hard to get a straight answer from the government on this.

After the first extension of the war, we were told that we wanted to train up 134,000 troops. That goal was met. We were then told we needed to train up 160,000 and, as of now, that is met. As of next year, we are told by the Pentagon and by NATO that 171,500 troops need to be trained and the government is saying that will be met, and that was before we committed to training the troops.

Notwithstanding the hon. member's admirable comments about the mission, does he not think we should be spending more money on a civilian mission, not cutting it and putting our money into training of troops when in fact we are going to meet those goals anyhow?

Hon. Jim Abbott: Madam Speaker, as I said, I had an opportunity in May of last year to travel with the committee. When I was there, I came to the very clear realization that we have a unique capacity as Canadians.

I just came from a lunch a few minutes ago where we were interfacing with an official from the Ukraine. He said that Canada is unique in that we as a people, as a culture, have empathy. We understand. We can wear the other person's shoes; that was the term he used.

I think it's very appropriate, and this is a boast about who we are as Canadians, that we can wear other people's shoes in the world. They respect that and they understand that we can train them.

For us not to take up this challenge of training the Afghan soldiers would be immoral on the part of Canada, given the respect we have from the people of Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Trois-Rivières.

Today I am happy to speak to the motion introduced by the Bloc Québécois asking the House to oppose another extension of the mission in Afghanistan. I am happy to do so because this is a democratic forum, and it is incumbent upon us to debate our ideas and opinions. It is somewhat unfortunate, however, that this has to come from the Bloc Québécois. The government made a promise, so it should have been the government's responsibility to ask for the House's permission to extend the military mission beyond the date the House had agreed to in spite of the opposition of the Bloc Québécois.

I will begin with a history of the mission, which I think is important if we are to understand the point we are at in this mission. It is not the first time the House has had to make a decision on this. Because both the Liberals and New Democrats went back and forth on this issue, we are in a situation where there are still Canadian troops in Afghanistan, when they could have returned home a long time ago.

The Liberals were in power when this mission was launched. I was not here and I do not remember if there was a vote. I did not hear about one. Once the new Parliament was convened after the 2006 general elections, this debate came to the fore again very quickly.

On May 17, 2006, the first vote was held on extending this mission. The motion stated that the House supported the extension of the deployment by the Government of Canada for a period of two years. The mission was to end at the beginning of 2007, and the purpose of the motion was to extend it until the beginning of 2009. At that time, the Bloc Québécois clearly expressed its opposition to the extension of this military mission, and it voted against the motion. The NDP did so as well. It was harder to determine the Liberals' position because their votes on the issue were split. They adopted a rather partisan approach, and in the ridings where this issue was particularly relevant, they voted against it. However, they made sure that they voted in sufficient numbers for the government to obtain Parliament's authorization to proceed.

Of course, the Bloc Québécois was disappointed by this decision, but Parliament had spoken on this issue and we had to acknowledge that fact. We have always said that the government should respect the will of this House. Therefore, once the House had made a decision, we could not go against its will simply because we did not agree with it. So, Canada extended its mission. It made international commitments and it decided to continue its presence until 2009.

On April 24, 2007, the House voted again on this issue. A motion had been presented by the Liberal member for Bourassa, and supported by the leader of the official opposition, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who is still the leader of the official opposition. This motion recognized that the mission “will continue until February 2009, at which time Canadian combat operations in Southern Afghanistan will conclude;”.

● (1310)

So, clearly, the House had before it a motion to ensure that we would end our military presence in Afghanistan at the beginning of 2009. We were pleased with this change of attitude on the part of the Liberals, and we were hoping that their whole caucus would support the mover and the seconder of their motion, namely the leader of the official opposition. That was the case. The Liberals all voted in favour of this motion to end the mission, to not extend it a second time. The Bloc Québécois did the same. That was its position. We had acknowledged the decision made by the House. Now that we had to vote again on the issue, we said we should withdraw from Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the NDP, for obviously partisan and vote-getting purposes, voted against that motion and joined the Conservatives to defeat it.

Business of Supply

Of course, they will tell us that they were hoping for an immediate departure from Afghanistan. I too shared that hope, but it does not change anything to the fact that the House had already voted for the year 2009, and that we had an opportunity to end the mission. If, at that time, the NDP had shown more foresight, if its leader had acted responsibly, if he had set aside political partisanship and his will to make small short-term political gains, and if instead he had protected the country's best interests, we would not be debating this motion today. If the NDP had acted responsibly in April 2007, we would have decided, as a Parliament, not to extend the mission again, and our troops would be out of Afghanistan since the beginning of 2009. So, this issue would have been settled for almost two years now. It is extremely unfortunate that it is not the case.

Later, in March 2008, a proposal from the government was negotiated, again with the Liberals. They changed their minds one more time. They were the ones who had proposed that we leave as early as 2009. However, following yet another episode of fancy dancing, the Liberals were now prepared to extend the mission. The motion read as follows:

that Canada should continue a military presence in Kandahar beyond February 2009 [the date set by this House], to July 2011...

It has been more than just another two years. We were against the first extension and we were against the second request. We wanted to put an end to it at our second opportunity and we were obviously against a third extension. We voted against the motion, just like the NDP, which sort of came to its senses at that point. Unfortunately, in the end—because of negotiations with the Liberals—the motion was adopted and, because of its international commitment, Canada's military had to remain in Kandahar until 2011.

And here we are today with a government that wants to find a way to continue the mission. It has once again come to an agreement with the Liberals. We are being told that this military presence will be for training purposes only. I would point out that a military presence is a military presence, and if they send the military somewhere, it is because they feel that the military is needed to do the job. If it were classroom training, they would not need people on the ground in a combat situation to do the job, and they would not send the military. They would send textbooks, training manuals. This is not classroom training, it is practical training, and practical combat training takes place in a combat situation. It seems pretty logical to me. And that is why the Bloc Québécois moved this motion in the House, so that our soldiers can leave Afghanistan and we can concentrate solely on the humanitarian aspect of this mission.

I encourage all of the hon. members to support this motion.

• (1315)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague.

The aim of this Parliament, the Canadian people, the United Nations and NATO is to do the right thing for the Afghan people. We have spent 10 years there. We have come a great distance in that time in many areas.

Does my hon. colleague not see the contradiction in that dedication Canadians have always had to freedom, democracy, the rule of law and helping those who cannot help themselves? Can he not see the value in Canada providing something that we have been asked to provide from top to bottom, from left to right, from everybody in this process because they value Canada's contribution? They value Canada's ability to train and build capacity in a non-combat role.

This is no different from the training that happens in Gagetown or places like that. They have not lost anybody in this type of training that NATO has been undertaking for the past four years.

Does the hon. member not see the value in providing the expertise Canada has to countries that need our help, to people who need our help, like the Afghan people and Afghanistan?

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Madam Speaker, I feel I have expressed my opinion fairly clearly. It is idealistic to think that there could be combat mission training without taking part in combat. And I am not the only one to think that way. Retired General Rick Hillier thinks the same thing. He feels that it is idealistic to think that we can train people without accompanying them into combat. We cannot give them theoretical training in a classroom and then ask them to fight afterwards, without being able to tell them if they are doing it right.

We feel that Canada's participation should be on a humanitarian and civilian level, not a military one.

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the debate for the last hour and a half. I would ask my friend from the Bloc Québécois to comment on the wording of the motion which gives me great difficulty and that is:

That this House condemn the government's decision to unilaterally extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to 2014....

If we are to believe what we are being told, and I have no reason not to believe what we are being told, the combat mission in Afghanistan will be over in 2011. It will be completed. It will be done.

I believe there is an obligation to continue in some civil role to the country of Afghanistan and the people who live there, but that is not what this motion states. I would like my friend to comment on that. I believe the whole preface of the motion is erroneous. I ask the hon. member why it was written in that manner.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Madam Speaker, I explained that in my presentation. Since things started in Afghanistan, the Liberals and New Democrats have been doing a lot of waffling and fancy footwork. This is still going on now in collaboration with the Conservative government.

Business of Supply

Let us not play with words. When there is a military presence in a foreign country, it is a military operation. When these people train other soldiers and accompany them into combat as part of that training, it is a military operation. Ever since the first time we had the chance to vote on extending this mission back in May 2006, the Bloc Québécois has been the only party opposed to all requests made in the House to extend the mission.

We feel that this is a trick. It is quite clear that the government, with the support of the Liberals, is trying to sell its proposal by saying that it is just training. Clearly, if the members of the House do not adopt the motion before us today and our soldiers remain in Afghanistan, some of those soldiers will take part in combat missions. Soldiers will continue to die while serving in Afghanistan. I am sure that the government and the Liberals will say exactly the same thing as I have today, that we cannot train soldiers in a combat zone without taking part in the combat.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the Bloc Québécois motion on this opposition day. I would like to reread the motion:

That this House condemn the government's decision to unilaterally [the word "unilaterally" is very important here] extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to 2014, whereby it is breaking two promises it made to Canadians, one made on May 10, 2006, in this House and repeated in the 2007 Throne Speech, that any military deployment would be subject to a vote in Parliament, and another made on January 6, 2010, that the mission in Afghanistan would become a strictly civilian commitment after 2011, without any military presence beyond what would be needed to protect the embassy.

What are we supposed to think about the change in the Conservative government's position now? In its 2006 election platform, the Conservative government told us the following:

A Conservative government will...make Parliament responsible for exercising oversight over...the commitment of Canadian Forces to foreign operations.

In the 2007 Speech from the Throne, the government reiterated its intention to let the House of Commons decide. In 2008, the House voted to extend the mission, but until 2011 only. We could say that the Conservative government is somewhat like St. Peter, who denied Christ three times by breaking his word three times. The military mission in Afghanistan will continue without debate, except for the debate raised by the Bloc Québécois today, and without a vote in the House. In our view, excluding all parliamentarians from this major issue is denying the democratic principles that should underlie all the work in the House.

The former chief of the defence staff for the Canadian Forces, General Rick Hillier, stated that it is impossible to train soldiers without monitoring them on the ground, meaning in the combat zone. It seems that the so-called new Afghan mission will not focus on humanitarian or training activity, but rather military activity, which we are opposed to.

Is there such a thing as training without combat? The Conservative government announced that it will keep a contingent of 950 soldiers in Afghanistan to train the future Afghan army. It was quick to say that Canadian soldiers will not be involved in combat during their training activities. Can we trust the government? Is it telling us the truth?

General Hillier, who is after all the former chief of the defence staff, said that to provide training, our troops will have to go into the

field of combat. We think the government's argument is window dressing. It must not be forgotten that General Hillier has a great deal of credibility. He led the NATO troops in Afghanistan and is very familiar with the reality in the field. I am strongly inclined to believe what he says about the operational requirements for military training. We can trust him because he has been there and has led the troops.

As one telling example, French troops present in Afghanistan are engaged in military training. That has not prevented them from suffering loss of life. What can we learn from the French forces' training mission? This is an important example to take into consideration now that we are obliged to make such a serious decision.

Since 2002, France has participated in training the Afghan national army. This initiative is called Opération Épідote, and its purpose is to train Afghan officers, battalions and special forces. This is what Canada is about to go and do. As part of this operation, teams of advisors and instructors embedded in operational units of the Afghan army coach and advise the Afghans in all of their combat missions and instructions.

• (1325)

How many French soldiers have died? As of October 15, 2010, 50 French soldiers had died in Afghanistan. In August 2010, two French soldiers were killed in Afghanistan while participating in the joint counter-insurgency operation with the Afghan army. On June 19, 2010, another soldier was killed by insurgent artillery fire while at a combat post. A French parachutist was killed on June 7, 2010, during a NATO mission. Nine other NATO soldiers were killed during that mission. On January 12, 2010, two French soldiers were killed while patrolling the Alasay valley. They were taking part in an international mission coaching the Afghan army.

I do not think anyone can tell me that there is no risk involved in these coaching missions.

On September 6, 2009, another French soldier was killed by an explosive device while participating in a reconnaissance convoy.

All of these examples illustrate the crux of the problem: how dangerous is a training mission? A training mission on a battlefield is dangerous and deadly.

The Bloc Québécois humbly suggests the following position to the House: the Bloc believes that Canada has done its part on the military front and that its role can be taken up by allied countries. As a state participating in the London and Kabul conferences, Canada must oversee a transition that is as peaceful and safe as possible to full assumption of control by the Afghan state. We are not shirking our responsibilities, for we are stakeholders in this, but not at any price.

The Bloc Québécois therefore proposes a three-pronged approach: first, support and training for the police forces and assistance in establishing the penal and administrative justice system; second, review and maintenance of official development assistance; and third, reconciliation and integration.

Business of Supply

When we talk about military presence and technical support, what do we mean? We mean that the combat group must terminate its combat mission in July 2011 along with the provincial reconstruction team. That team of soldiers is responsible for protecting the NGOs. However, the majority of NGOs want the provincial reconstruction team to withdraw because they believe that the presence of troops is incompatible with their humanitarian mission.

The training of Afghan police officers has taken a back seat to the training of Afghan soldiers. However, a strong police presence is crucial to the proper functioning of society. The Bloc Québécois therefore recommends sending a contingent of 50 police officers to train Afghan police forces.

As for creating a modern judicial system, we believe that trust in that system is one of the fundamental elements of a lawful society. NATO has taught us that the Afghans prize the system's notion of fairness and prefer the use of the informal system, as the formal governmental system is perceived as highly corrupt. To ensure adequate training and proper functioning of the Afghan judicial system, the Bloc Québécois proposes sending a delegation of Canadian legal experts to support and promote the modernization of the judicial system. These are some training aspects that are not military in nature.

We must also support the prison system. By all accounts, the Afghan prison system has some serious shortcomings, as demonstrated by the Afghan detainee issue and allegations of torture in Afghan prisons.

According to NATO, by western standards, conditions in many detention and correction facilities vary from inadequate to extremely poor in some places. We suggest that the directors of Afghan prisons be supported by Canadian deputy directors. We therefore recommend sending 50 civilians from our correctional system.

Lastly, we also propose the creation of a public service. A public service like the one we have in Quebec does not exist in Afghanistan and must therefore be created.

● (1330)

The take-home message is that we need to hold a vote in the House on the government's decision and proceed democratically. That is our main message.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my fellow member for her remarks.

I must say that I am a little concerned because, on this side of the chamber, we have often said that this mission will truly focus on training. And yet, I hear my fellow member repeating that the military mission will continue, when such is not the case. In addition, the French soldiers of which she spoke are playing a role in operational training, mentoring and liaison, which will end in 2011. This is not the same type of training that will be given once the combat role ends.

Will my fellow member tell me why she cannot understand that she is talking about something completely different and why she does not want to admit that this will be a non-combat mission

focused exclusively on training unlike the training to which she referred that was given by the French.

● (1335)

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Madam Speaker, my fellow member and I disagree about the training aspect of this mission. We are saying that the Canadian government may well send 950 soldiers in good faith, but this will still be a combat mission. According to General Hillier, even if all we do is train soldiers, we will still have to take those soldiers to battle stations to test the techniques. We do not believe that this mission will consist of only training. We believe that it will be yet another combat mission and that lives will be lost. In my view, it is very important to make a distinction between these two things. As we have seen, the French training mission, which involved soldiers, resulted in 50 deaths.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns that many of us have had, notwithstanding the government breaking its promise to have a vote and a debate, is the leap-frogging in this mission. We have gone from 2006, extension 2009, extension 2009 to 2011, extension 2011 now to 2014. Each and every time we have had a debate in the House about an extension of the war, we are told that is it.

Why is it that two weeks ago the Prime Minister was unequivocal when he said that this was the end of the military mission and now we are told, with a snap of the fingers, that we will have it till 2014? Why should Canadians believe the government this time?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

He is right; how can we believe the government? If the past is any indication, we really have to wonder. When someone goes back on their word three times, that is worrisome.

The basic principle is that this House must make decisions on behalf of the people. We are duly elected. In my riding, like all of the others, there are soldiers who have gone to Afghanistan and who have returned. Some, unfortunately, returned seriously injured and it is hard for their families to see them like this.

We believe that it is important for the House to make these decisions, so that we can explain to our constituents that we were fully aware of the consequences. Furthermore, we think it is important that the House be able to debate and vote on this issue.

[*English*]

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will divide my time today with the member for Richmond Hill.

I will vote against this motion. The motion will not likely pass, as we know already, and what we say today will not change this outcome.

On a matter that is one of life and death for those in the military committed by our actions or for those who come home and who carry with them an experience that shapes their lives for a lifetime, one would expect a soul-searching debate of many weeks and months. But that is not what we have.

So if there is no real debate, let us at least set out some of the questions we would have discussed had there been one and keep those in mind as we get to the next milestones of the Afghanistan mission in 2011, 2014 and beyond.

I was in university at the height of the Vietnam war. Vietnam offered us many lessons. It taught us what happens when ideology, in this case Cold War ideology, makes us blind to what is there to see, when rhetoric sucks us in and sticks us with the wrong persuasive image, an image then of dominoes falling: if Vietnam falls, so will all of Southeast Asia; if Southeast Asia falls, so will....

But it also taught us of other traps. "Five hundred soldiers have been killed", the U.S. government and military told us; "we can't allow them to have died in vain". So more soldiers were committed, and more died. One thousand, 10,000, 20,000, until the war was not about dominoes anymore, and 10,000 more died because 20,000 had already died, and then 10,000 more. "We cannot leave now", and there were 10,000 more.

Lessons offered, many lessons not learned, and one lesson that was learned: the U.S. public, in dismissing the Vietnam war, also dismissed the dedication of its soldiers. Its soldiers returned home broken and received no healing thanks. That would not happen the next time.

So in the years after September 11, 2001, Canada went into Afghanistan to fight terrorism, and in fighting terrorism, also to fight for those abused, especially women, by Afghan life.

Debate is so hard in a time of war. Criticism sounds unpatriotic. It is as if in war we lose our right to question and think. Yet it is a time when we must question and must think. Canadians are dying. Afghans are dying. We have to be right. Situations can change, or we can begin to see those same situations differently. It is not about questioning our soldiers. Barring some rare abhorrent act, soldiers are always right. They do what they are told to do. It is their generals, or more so, it is those of us in Ottawa. It is their government. We make the final decisions. If we are wrong, far more than us, they pay the price.

We have to encourage debate because it is so easy to shut down debate and get things wrong; because this is about life and death, not dollars and cents; because we cannot face the prospect of being wrong.

It is so easy for us to wrap ourselves in the flag, to hide behind our soldiers, and at the first hint of criticism, say "We have to support our men and women in uniform", to choke off debate of any kind. And who can argue?

In Vietnam, then, dismissive of the war, Americans were dismissive of their soldiers. In Canada now, far from being dismissive of our soldiers, it is very hard for us to be dismissive of any war they fight.

● (1340)

But true support for our men and women is committing them always to the right cause with the right chance to succeed, the right cause and chance today, tomorrow and every next day after that. So we must keep our eyes and minds always open, always alert.

Business of Supply

More than 200 years ago, Samuel Johnson described patriotism as the last vestige of a scoundrel. This is not necessarily the case as Johnson understood it, but it can be. Question period, scrums and sound bites offer no time for thoughtful resolution, only enough time for pandering.

"But that is just the politics of it," we say, "no big deal". But in the absence of any other discussion, it becomes a big deal.

War, like grain subsidies, health care, and affordable housing, is about choices. We must provide our military the tools they need for the task we ask them to do, but is that task in Afghanistan, Darfur, or someplace else? Is it in defence, diplomacy, development, or all three? Or does it depend? There are choices. Do we buy the F-35 and pursue the foreign policy an F-35 can pursue, or fewer of them, or more?

People die in war. Tens of thousands of other Canadians die years and years before others do because they do not have the right food, the right shelter, or the right start in life. It costs about \$2 billion a year to conduct our fight in Afghanistan. There are choices.

In Afghanistan, we know what we hope. We hope to shut down the actions of terrorists beyond Afghan borders. We hope for education and better lives for the Afghan people, especially for Afghan women. And we hope that long after we leave, the Afghan people will want this for themselves and be able to sustain this by themselves. Right now, we hope far more than we know, but we cannot allow hope, the ideology of terrorism-fighting, and the loss of Canadian lives to make us blind. The stakes are too high.

What do we owe the 153 Canadian soldiers who have died in Afghanistan? What do we owe their families? We owe them respect and gratitude. We owe them remembrance of what they have done for their country. More than anything, we owe them good choices in the future, for the sake of those who come after them.

I will vote against this motion, but like everyone else in this House and like everyone else in this country, I will go from here into the future with my eyes wide open.

● (1345)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is good to know that the Liberal Party is not supporting this motion and has quite clearly outlined why we should stay in Afghanistan. Perhaps the hon. member can say what the Bloc and the NDP are inferring, too, which is that we should be in Afghanistan but without the security. How is that possible, that we do not train the people of Afghanistan to take care of themselves? As the foreign affairs critic said, it is critically important that Afghans take over the destiny of their country. We all agree with that.

Business of Supply

So why does it feel as though the other two parties are saying things like we should be leaving, but the security blanket should be left alone? If it is not done by us, then by whom, may I ask?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Madam Speaker, I think the challenge for everyone in the House is to see that in fact we fulfill the commitment that we say we are making, a commitment that is for development, a commitment that is for training, a commitment that is not in a combat role.

I think the challenge and the record of governments in lots of places in the world is a very sketchy one in terms of maintaining those kinds of promises. When a country is in a war environment, it is very difficult not to be engaged in a combat role.

That is why, as I was trying to say in my remarks, we have to be really vigilant, each of each other, each of ourselves, because it is so easy to slide into a different role.

That is what we are voting on today, the literal support of that mission, of training and of development and not a combat role.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am trying to understand the position taken today by the Liberal member, who made a sober speech. I remind him of today's motion. What does it say? It calls on the government to respect two commitments. The first is the commitment made in May 2006 that any extension of Canada's mission in Afghanistan would be put to a vote in Parliament. The second is the commitment to ensure that if the mission were to continue after 2011 that it would be a civilian one. That commitment was reiterated in January 2010.

My question for the Liberal member is simple. Why is the Liberal Party refusing to demand that any extension of Canada's mission in Afghanistan be put to a vote in Parliament, as the government committed?

• (1350)

[*English*]

Hon. Ken Dryden: Madam Speaker, my understanding is that this is not an extension of a combat role.

If it is not an extension of a combat role, then that is a very different story than what was brought up in the member's question.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be brief. I always enjoy listening to the comments of the member for York Centre. I know he is the ultimate team player. His speech today was articulate.

I just want to ask the member a question. The papers today quote his colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville as saying that Afghans do not need training, that the military that defeated the Soviets in the 1980s does not require our help.

That was his former leader, as I said, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. His current leader, of course, is on a different page. I wonder which one of his colleagues he agrees with.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Madam Speaker, I have not been to Afghanistan. I have not seen up close what the needs are.

I am going on the basis that in fact there is an ongoing need, in order to take on that larger role. As more soldiers from other

countries leave or those ones stay in non-combat roles, there is that much more responsibility and a much larger task for those Afghans who remain, and therefore the training of them.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to participate in today's debate.

First, having travelled to Afghanistan on three different occasions, I have had an opportunity to see our men and women in the field, in the OMLT, in Kandahar, working with Afghans and assisting the Afghan national army in a support role. There is no question in my mind that Canadians are making a significant difference in Afghanistan and they are making that significant difference under the UN resolution and as part of NATO.

Canada has always been, and will continue to be, a country that responds when the need is there. On the issues of international terrorism and dealing with and creating a stable and productive Afghanistan, Canada does not take second place to anyone. We have done an outstanding job there. Every Canadian soldier, every aid worker and every contractor there will tell us that they are making a difference in the lives of the average Afghan.

The discussion before the House deals with whether we should have a training mission, what is commonly known as inside the wire, after the combat role ends in 2011.

In my view, there are two ways we could go. We could simply say that the combat mission ends, therefore our responsibility ends and then we go home and let somebody else do the job. I believe Canadians, by and large, do not take that view. They take the view that 152 Canadians have lost their lives there, 152 Canadians have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

What else can we do? Our party has always supported the 3-D approach, which is defence, diplomacy and development. However, clearly one of the elements is in the area of training the Afghan national army, so it not only can it defend itself, but it can also train other Afghans so they will not need international assistance.

It is important that we have a force there, which is now over 170,000, an Afghan army that is able not only to secure the territory, but also to defend that territory and defend the sovereignty of Afghanistan, not just from the Taliban but also from outside sources, such as al-Qaeda.

I believe that the training inside the wire, on which the government has enunciated although I know more details will come, in Kabul and in the military academy, will allow Afghan soldiers to continue on in defence of their country.

Some would argue that this is a continuation of the military mission, but clearly the focus of this mission will change. What we are expecting of our forces is going to change. We are not going to be out in the field in a support role. We are not going to be out in the field in any combat role. We are training and we are going to train individuals.

On my third trip to Afghanistan, we asked all key Afghan officials, the foreign minister, U.S. General McChrystal and others what their biggest need was. Clearly the biggest need, which we came back and enunciated, was for training, not just for the Afghan national army, but for the Afghan national police. We have now heard from the government that it believes, in concert with our allies, that training is a necessary component and that Canada can contribute in a very valuable and specific way to the training of the Afghan national army.

It is not only about training however. It is also about support for development, for more and more students to go to school. Six million young people have gone to school who did not go before. However, we cannot build schools and clinics unless there is security. We cannot have security unless we have forces that are trained in order to secure those towns, villages and cities.

• (1355)

Therefore, I believe we will play a role which will improve the quality of life for the average Afghan. It will allow young girls to go to school. A few years ago, when we had the opportunity to meet with President Karzai, he indicated that, for the first time in Afghan history, 600 doctors would graduate and 300 of them would women.

When we think of where Afghanistan was just over 10 years ago, young children, particularly girls, did not school and women did not go out of the house. They were confined. They could not get an education. Think of the development next year when the Dahla Dam is completed, which is one of the three signature projects in which Canada has been involved. It will not only provide clean running water but electricity, it will also help irrigate significant areas of southern Afghanistan for the growing of wheat in particular.

If we really want to change the lives of individuals, the only way we can do that is to provide the kind of skill sets that, in this case, Canada is good at. We have significant aid workers there and they have to be protected. Again, the training of the Afghan forces and providing those skill sets will assist in terms of the protection of aid workers, whether they are ours or someone else's.

Advancing security and the rule law is another area in which Canada has been involved. It is embedded in the ministry of justice. As a vice-chair of the Afghanistan special committee, I have been able to witness that. With some of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, we were able to see those kinds of changes.

The rule of law is absolutely important, as well as training people on human rights.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I regret interrupting the hon. member. He can continue his comments when debate resumes after question period. We will now move to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NATIONAL HOLODOMOR AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, in 1932 and 1933, millions of

Statements by Members

Ukrainians died because of a politically instituted famine known as the Holodomor. The direct translation of Holodomor means death by starvation, a genocidal policy put in place by Joseph Stalin.

At the peak of the Holodomor, 25,000 Ukrainians were perishing from hunger each and every day. A full third of these were vulnerable and innocent children.

The suffering caused by the Holodomor is, without question, one of the worst peacetime tragedies the world has ever known. As this is National Holodomor Awareness Week, I implore all my fellow members to honour the victims of this genocide by learning more about the Holodomor so tragedies like this will never be permitted to be perpetrated on the innocent in this world again.

* * *

• (1400)

[Translation]

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF LASALLE

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last month, during a ceremony in celebration of LaSalle's volunteers, the Boys and Girls Club of LaSalle won the 2010 Moulin d'or award for organization of the year. This award, which is presented by members of the borough council, acknowledges the generosity and exceptional value of an organization's involvement in its community.

The Boys and Girls Club of LaSalle has worked with youth for many years to develop their self-esteem, leadership qualities and sense of belonging in the community. Through quality programming, these young people are given every opportunity to realize their full potential.

I am very proud to offer my heartfelt congratulations for this well deserved, impressive achievement to the Boys and Girls Club of LaSalle, its board of directors, its executive director, Mark Branch, and its incredible team.

On behalf of my colleagues, I wish them every success in the coming years.

* * *

NATALY BOULERICE

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, on behalf of all my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to congratulate Nataly Boulerice, a dynamic singer-songwriter from Saint-Édouard who is very involved in her community, on being honoured with a Galaxie Rising Stars award this year.

Statements by Members

On September 15, during an evening event organized by the St-Tite western festival, SOCAN, Culture Country and the Galaxie music network, Ms. Boulerice won second prize in the country pop/rock/folk category for her song *Veillez veillez*. The song is on a compilation album of the 10 finalist songs for this special evening.

I am extremely proud of how committed Ms. Boulerice is to sharing her passion for the arts and culture, and I encourage her to continue growing as a musician and cultural ambassador. But above all, I support her as she follows her dreams. Her commitment to her community is an inspiration to many up-and-coming artists.

Bravo, Ms. Boulerice.

* * *

[English]

WINDSOR GOODFELLOWS CLUB

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as its annual Old Boys Newspaper campaign gets under way, I would like to recognize the Windsor Goodfellows Club, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary of giving.

Founded in 1910 out of the deep concern that no child or family go hungry, the organization has established essential programs to address this need. In the past year alone, over 11,000 food boxes were distributed by the food bank, feeding over 60,000 people, assisting nine area schools with their breakfast programs. More than 1,300 pairs of new shoes were given to children.

All these efforts were made possible by one paid staff member and 152 volunteers. This organization exemplifies volunteer service as it receives no funding from any level of government or not-for-profit agency.

Unfortunately the concerns and issues that initiated the Goodfellows founding 100 years ago are still with us today. Its continued efforts, which have significant support from across the community, display what determination and citizen action can accomplish when we all work together.

I thank the Goodfellows.

* * *

SASKATCHEWAN ROUGHRIDERS

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week thousands of Rider fans will descend on Edmonton and turn the streets around Commonwealth Stadium into a sea of green. Households will be without watermelons for their families this weekend as the stores will run dry as Rider fans clean them out.

The Riders truly bring the people of Saskatchewan together. NDP or Sask Party, Saskatoon or Regina, Tim Hortons or Robin's Donuts, John Deere or CASE IH, we all put aside our differences every game day.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Riders. A special loonie was struck to commemorate the event and dozens of communities across the province celebrated to mark a century of Rider football.

Did members know that over half of all CFL merchandise sold in Canada is Rider gear? Every away game sounds like a home game, as most of the fans in Edmonton, Calgary, B.C. and even Toronto cheer for the green and white.

Darian Durant, Wes Cates, Regina native Chris Getzlaf and the whole Rider team will do our province proud this weekend. Redemption is in order as a rematch of the last Grey Cup will give the Riders another opportunity to bring home the trophy.

With a whole province behind them, I know the Riders will do us proud. Go Riders.

* * *

PENSIONS

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are genuinely concerned about their future well-being in retirement. They are undeniably nervous and anxious about whether they will ever be able to amass the necessary resources to live in reasonable comfort. They wonder whether the tools and safeguards for generating those resources are stable enough to ensure that these needs are met.

However, instead of acting to relieve Canadians of these concerns, the Conservatives are acting to worsen that anxiety.

On May 17 of this year, the Conservatives secretly changed the rules and the benefits of RRSPs and registered retirement income funds. As of that day in May, all Canadians who withdraw a lump sum from their RRIF will likely lose their eligibility to the guaranteed income supplement for up to two years.

As it stands now, if a senior citizen with modest means needs to make an emergency withdrawal from his or her RRIF to pay for an unforeseen medical expense, an emergency home repair or any other necessity, he or she will lose the GIS in return. If that is not bad enough, the senior will not necessarily learn of the consequence until the year after because GIS eligibility—

● (1405)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Huron—Bruce

* * *

MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 2, 2010, Huron county native, Captain Jeffrey Middleton Powell, received the Meritorious Service Medal from the Governor General of Canada.

Captain Powell and the air crew of Rescue 903, a Cormorant search and rescue helicopter, rescued three stranded sailors from their rapidly sinking dredging barge off the coast of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Flying through hazardous, icy conditions, with winds of up to 40 knots and in six metre seas, the aircraft arrived on scene with minimal fuel to spare. Over the next hour, the crew proceeded to hoist the three sailors on board the aircraft one by one as darkness approached. Shortly after the successful rescue, while the aircraft was proceeding to shore, the barge reportedly sank.

Tremendous effort, focus on the mission and the utmost in air crew coordination resulted in three lives being saved.

Jeff is a true Canadian hero and all his family should be very proud.

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[Translation]

MICHELINE GROLEAU

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, I want to pay tribute to Micheline Groleau, a woman who lives in my riding. On the occasion of the 2010 International Day of Older Persons, Ms. Groleau was named volunteer of the year for the Laurentians.

For 27 years, Ms. Groleau has been volunteering at the Centre d'action bénévole Les Artisans de l'Aide in Saint-Eustache as a receptionist and in other capacities as well. She arranges for and provides transportation for seniors going to medical appointments. Ms. Groleau is also involved in the para transit project in Saint-Eustache.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues join me in congratulating her and wishing her every success in her future endeavours.

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[English]

NATIONAL PARKS

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to acknowledge the 125th anniversary of Canada's first national park. Exactly 125 years ago, thanks to Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, an order in council set aside 26 square kilometres near Banff, which began our system of national parks.

Banff has come a long way in 125 years. It began with the dream of a transcontinental railway and along that rail line is built a series of grand hotels, the grandest of all being the Banff Springs Hotel. It is the jewel of the line and comparable to any European castle. It was built in Scottish baronial style and the area was named after a location in Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Banff today remains the only incorporated municipality within the Canadian national parks.

Our national parks system started 125 years ago with Banff. Today, she is still the majestic queen of our natural refuges. It is truly a remarkable legacy of heritage creation and preservation on behalf of all Canadians.

* * *

PREMIER OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Premier Danny Williams has well-represented the people of Newfoundland and Labrador with steadfast dedication and a political energy that will be long remembered.

Premier Williams promoted the people of Newfoundland and Labrador with tenacity unmatched in Canadian politics. A Rhodes scholar and a successful businessman, he was truly of and for the people.

Statements by Members

Premier Williams sought and succeeded in turning around the provincial economy and now there is a new sense of optimism and confidence. The premier will be well-remembered for his contributions to developing the oil and gas and resource sectors, as well as for his accomplishment on the Lower Churchill. He was equally dedicated to social development and fought to reduce poverty. He supported the volunteer sector and championed education.

This morning, Premier Williams quoted John F. Kennedy who said, "Anyone can make a difference, and everyone should try". Premier Williams did more than try. He succeeded.

We thank Premier Williams for his dedication to the province, for his contributions and for his legacy.

* * *

DURBAN CONFERENCE

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a Conservative government will not hesitate to combat racism in all its forms.

Last December, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to hold an event in September of next year to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the first Durban conference. This new event is being labelled in the media as Durban III.

Just as Canada was the first country in the world to withdraw from Durban II, so, too, will Canada lead in withdrawing from Durban III.

Our Conservative government has lost faith in the Durban process. We will not lend Canada's good name to this new Durban event, which observes an agenda that promotes racism rather than combats it.

As we have said all along, we are proud of our principled foreign policy positions. Our government makes foreign policy decisions based on what is right, not what is popular. We will continue to do so.

* * *

● (1410)

DAVID LAM

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the Hon. David Lam, former Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, who sadly lost his battle with cancer this week.

Dr. Lam was the first Chinese Canadian Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, serving from 1988 to 1995.

Born in Hong Kong, he moved to Vancouver in 1967 and dedicated four decades to public service.

Statements by Members

Dr. Lam's contributions to Vancouver and British Columbia are breathtaking. His generosity as a philanthropist was without limit. He was a renowned supporter of our parks and public spaces. He was passionate about multiculturalism, funding many cultural projects and working tirelessly to promote a society that respects the contributions of new Canadians. He deeply valued education and was instrumental in funding programs that fostered understanding between different cultures and communities.

Dr. Lam's service to the public and our country is an exemplary reminder of the contributions made every day by Chinese Canadians and by all new Canadians to our nation.

Today we mourn the loss of a life well lived. We are a better country for it. Our deepest sympathy and thanks go out to the Lam family.

* * *

[Translation]

DURBAN CONFERENCE

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our government announced that Canada will not be attending the September 2011 conference commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action. Our government will not hesitate to combat all forms of racism.

Last December, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to hold an event in September 2011 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the first Durban conference, which was held in 2001. The media is dubbing this new event Durban III.

Canada was the first country to announce its withdrawal from Durban II and it will now be the first to announce that it will not be attending Durban III.

Our government no longer has any confidence in the Durban process. Canada's reputation would be compromised if it took part in this new Durban event, whose agenda promotes racism rather than combats it.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 2010 marks the 11th anniversary of the United Nations' proclamation of November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Violence can take many forms: forced marriage, repudiation, female genital mutilation, physical violence, trafficking, rape—especially during times of war—persecution of lesbians, and even stoning or murder. These actions are sometimes perpetrated with the blessing of governments, or even organized by them.

Worldwide, one woman in two is subjected to acts of violence, which put all women at risk and hinder efforts made by all societies to foster development, peace and gender equality. Let us put an end to it.

In closing, I deplore the absence of the Minister for Status of Women from the launch of the YWCA Rose Campaign this morning.

* * *

[English]

CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE FOR VAUGHAN

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year, a petition was circulated condemning the actions of Julian Fantino as OPP commissioner for his actions at Caledonia. The petition denounced flawed policing and demanded a public inquiry into the actions and decisions made by the commissioner of the OPP, Julian Fantino.

Thousands of Canadians signed a petition, along with the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. It would appear that the Conservative government supports an inquiry into the actions of Julian Fantino.

As a member of cabinet, the Minister of Human Resources represents the views of the government. According to the petition, not only did she want an inquiry, she wanted him suspended without pay and, pending the inquiry, fired altogether.

If the minister did not have the confidence in the Prime Minister's hand-picked candidate then, how can she or the Prime Minister expect the voters of Vaughan to have confidence in him now?

* * *

● (1415)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations has declared today the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

In too many places around the world, violence against women, whether physical, sexual or psychological, is impeding the equality of women.

Violence against women is an issue that affects far too many Canadian women. It is also a daily reality for women in communities worldwide. Ending violence against women requires an effort from governments, civil society and citizens.

For the last 30 years, the federal government's foreign aid program has been committed to integrating equality between men and women. The responsibility of men in this process is unequivocal. We need to have our voices heard by speaking out and we need to take action by getting involved.

It is a sign of strength to stand up for something as critical as ending violence against women. It is a sign of weakness to stand back and silently let it happen.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***TASEKO MINES LIMITED**

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two weeks before the government made public a decision to block Taseko's bid for a controversial mine, shares in the company mysteriously crashed. In a matter of hours, 30 million shares traded hands, 10 times the normal rate. At one point, investors dumped 2.7 million shares in 40 seconds, obliterating hundreds of millions of dollars in the blink of an eye.

Someone somewhere in the Conservative government leaked information. Insiders got wildly rich and investors got hammered.

The government has known this for six weeks. Has it launched an investigation, called in the RCMP or done anything at all?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what we do know. A publicly available environmental assessment on this project stated quite clearly that it would cause irreparable harm to the environment. That document has been public for quite some time. People can speculate what they want. In fact, there was significant speculation that the government would approve the project, but we did not. We did the right thing for our environment.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in one day, out of nowhere, with no news, the stock dropped 40%. That is no accident. This was a decision of the Conservative government, of its cabinet. When did the share prices in Taseko plunge? Around the same time the minister secretly met in cabinet to block the mine. While normal investors got wiped out, insiders leaked the information, shorted the stock and made millions.

What assurances do we have that Conservative insiders did not make out like bandits, and why after six weeks has the RCMP not been called in?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is engaging in pure speculation. The bottom line is that the government did the right thing for our environment.

The member is making some pretty serious allegations. If he has any facts he would like to put on the table, he should table them in this place after question period.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just did table the facts and here they are again.

Cabinet ministers met and share prices plunged two weeks before the public knew anything. That is no accident. It is a leak. Share prices dropped and then two weeks later when the news came out, they went back to exactly the same place. It is an illegal act benefiting connected insiders and leaving average shareholders devastated. It is a scandal not blown open by the government but by shareholders themselves.

Has the government called in the security unit of PCO to investigate its cabinet? Has it done anything in the last six weeks, except to try to bury it and get away with this leak?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite makes so many false allegations. We know the member and that he has had to apologize for his reckless actions in the past.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 14, when Taseko share prices plunged for no apparent reason, civil servants immediately suspected a government leak. That very issue was discussed at a cabinet meeting right around that date. Fluctuations in the share price seem to confirm a government leak, and the matter is now being investigated by financial authorities.

The Prime Minister has been aware of this for the past six weeks. Has he asked the RCMP to investigate?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite wants to check the parliamentary calendar, October 14 was in a constituency week and members were in their ridings.

● (1420)

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not seem to understand the gravity of the situation. We are talking about his government, his own ministers, being involved in illegal insider trading.

Can he at least confirm that the Privy Council Office is investigating this matter? If not, can he assure this House that no one in his government or his party profited from this privileged information, illegally lining their pockets on the backs of Taseko shareholders?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite wants to engage in slander, smearing reputations and character assassination. If he has any information, he should table it before Parliament.

If he has the courage of his convictions, why does he not make the specific allegations that he is charging?

* * *

*[Translation]***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, rumour has it that the minister responsible for infrastructure is about to announce a six-month extension of the March 31 deadline for infrastructure projects funded by the infrastructure stimulus fund. Yet the Minister of Finance said again recently that extending the deadline would be unfair to those who met it.

Can the Prime Minister tell us which of these two versions is the official position of the government?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for some time now, we have been encouraging municipalities and other levels of government to complete their projects, but the minister has been saying for a long time that the government will be flexible in order to ensure that these projects are completed.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the March 31 deadline threatens 353 infrastructure projects in Quebec worth a whopping \$210 million. That is not small change. Can the Prime Minister confirm that he will extend the March 31 deadline for all infrastructure projects and that he will not get into a case-by-case policy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the information we have, more than 90% of projects will be completed by the deadline. The minister has said for a long time that the government will be flexible in order to ensure that these projects are completed.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the president of the Fédération québécoise des municipalités, Bernard Généreux, deplores the piecemeal approach of the Conservative government, which refuses to extend the March 31, 2011, deadline for all infrastructure projects. He expressed his extreme displeasure and criticized the fact that “the federal government has abandoned Quebec.”

Will the government finally listen to the call by Quebec municipalities to extend the March 31, 2011, deadline for all infrastructure projects?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have good news for the member. We are working with Quebec's ministers and, as usual, we have good relations with that government. We are always prudent, reasonable and also flexible. There will be an announcement shortly.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he is a real Houdini.

One-third of Quebec's projects risk going down the drain because of the Conservatives' lack of flexibility. In recent weeks, we have given many examples. The City of Quebec will have to assume the federal share of the cost of the Monique-Corriveau library. In Montreal, the 2-22 Ste. Catherine project and the expansion of Les Deux Mondes theatre are in jeopardy.

Will the government extend the March 31 deadline for all projects, yes or no?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought I might be congratulated on my French today.

[*English*]

Certainly, what we have said all along is we are going to be fair and reasonable on this. More than that, we have been working together with the provinces and the municipalities to make sure these projects get done.

The reason is important, because we have, through the economic action plan, created 420,000 jobs in this country. Almost all of these projects are going to get done. We are going to be flexible to make sure they all get done, that jobs continue to be created and the good relationships with the provinces continue.

•(1425)

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are still wondering why it is that we have to leave our troops in such a dangerous war zone for another three years.

Even the previous Liberal leader is now questioning whether or not we should be training the Afghan army. The Prime Minister himself said that he does not want to give a dime to the Afghan government because it is corrupt. Well, if it is as corrupt as he says it is, why does he want the Afghan government to have an even bigger army and why is he going to use our soldiers to help it get one?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear on what I said. What I said was that we would not give a dime to the Afghan government unless we were assured that money would be used properly.

In the case of the training of the Afghan army, it just astounds me that the NDP does not understand that a secure Afghanistan taking care of its own security is vital to the global security interest, not just of the world but of this country as well.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number of trained Afghan soldiers has just reached 134,000, four years earlier than planned. The new objective is 171,000 soldiers. According to NATO, this objective will be met by October 2011, once again sooner than expected.

The training of soldiers is ahead of schedule. The objective set for 2014 has already been met. Why then do our soldiers have to stay in Afghanistan?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the combat mission will end next year as planned. With regard to the training of Afghan forces, although we have made progress, we have clearly not finished the work. NATO will continue with this task, which is very important for our security and that of the world.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the Prime Minister simply has broken his promise on this issue. The Conservative government is now scrambling to try to find an explanation. Government officials had been planning a major civilian initiative in Afghanistan, but then they were left scrambling with only days to shift gears because the Prime Minister wanted to keep the emphasis on the military.

The Conservatives promised to build 50 schools. They only built 26. Where are the schools? Where are the trained teachers? Why are we not putting the emphasis where it should be placed if we are going to build a peaceful future in Afghanistan?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the intellectual hoops through which the NDP will jump to justify its opposition to the mission in Afghanistan are really quite extraordinary. The fact is the current mission does not end until next year. As I have said, when that mission ends, we will replace it with a much smaller mission focused entirely on training.

In the meantime, as the leader of the NDP observes, we are doing important things such as building schools and educating children, but that only happens because security is provided and this is vital to make sure we accomplish these other goals.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Paul Sauvé testified under oath about a kickback system within the Conservative Party. He had to give 3% of his contract to a friend in the Conservative regime, and the minister then asked him for a new cashmere coat. Paul Sauvé even had to hold fundraisers for the Prime Minister's party.

How can the Prime Minister turn a blind eye to these practices within his own party instead of calling the RCMP?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Mr. Sauvé appeared before committee, he said that the only member of Parliament that he had met with was a Liberal member of Parliament, the Liberal member of Parliament for Bourassa and it was in his position as Quebec lieutenant. Apparently the former minister was encouraging him to sell memberships to the Liberal Party to stand for Parliament. That is all I learned this week.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is visibly trying to sweep those revelations under the rug. There is talk of corruption in the construction industry and it seems that the Conservative Party is running the show.

How can the Prime Minister tolerate this kind of organized corruption within his own party? Why has he not asked the RCMP to investigate this and why has he not suspended the Conservative operatives, staffers and minister who are implicated?

• (1430)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say very directly to the member opposite, the Prime Minister has never tried to sweep under the rug the scandal that is the Liberal member for Bourassa.

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CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE FOR VAUGHAN

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources refuses to do her duty to disabled Canadians by reviewing allegations of funnelling support money to Conservative ridings. Yet when it comes to Conservative candidate Julian Fantino, she has no problem signing a petition not only calling for an inquiry into his actions, but calling for him to be fired as OPP commissioner.

Why the double standard? Or did she only sign for short-term political gain?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Julian Fantino is an outstanding public servant who has served the

people of Ontario in an exemplary fashion. The member will be able to tell him so personally after November 29.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is no small matter. The member was a minister when she signed a petition demanding that the Prime Minister's hand-picked candidate in Vaughan, Julian Fantino, be investigated. She wanted his pay docked. She wanted him suspended and she wanted him fired. Does she still hold the same view now, and if not, what has changed?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can only state that Julian Fantino is an outstanding public servant who has served the people of Ontario in an exemplary fashion. But the question I have, and which I ask again, is what is Tony Genco hiding? Why will Tony Genco's friends at Downsview Park not release full and complete expense reports? That is what we want to know.

* * *

[Translation]

CONTAMINATED WATER IN SHANNON

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the topic of TCE contaminated water in Shannon, the House ordered the government to produce analysis reports from the Valcartier military base's water supply system dating back to 1970. Quebec's National Assembly unanimously supports this order for the production of documents. The government has continued to refuse to make public these potentially incriminating documents.

Out of respect for Shannon's numerous victims, does the government intend to produce the reports as quickly as possible, as it has been ordered to do by the House?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

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QUEBEC CITY ARENA

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is meeting with Bonhomme Carnaval today. This is good news for Quebec City. But the minister responsible for the Quebec City region has been promising for some time to set up a meeting between the Prime Minister and Mayor Labeaume to discuss the federal contribution to the construction of the multi-purpose arena in Quebec City.

When is the Prime Minister going to give the mayor of Quebec City the same consideration as he gave Bonhomme today? What is he waiting for?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are obviously delighted to welcome Bonhomme Carnaval today and delighted that the Prime Minister will be able to meet with him.

That being said, as for the arena issue, I had the opportunity to meet with Mayor Labeaume on October 8 to discuss his plan. We will continue to work together on it, whether the hon. member for Québec likes it or not.

*Oral Questions***ARTS AND CULTURE**

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, several of the people who promote our artists abroad note that abolishing the programs for artists touring abroad has adversely affected the competitiveness of our artists and the dissemination of Quebec culture. Younger artists are particularly affected by the Conservative cuts. CINARS estimates that the cuts over the past two years have generated losses of \$15 million, and the cancellation of approximately 1,600 performances abroad.

Will the government finally understand that the decision to abolish the support programs for promotional tours was a very poor decision indeed, both from the cultural and economic points of view?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, we terminated a program that was totally counterproductive. It was a \$7 million program. It cost \$5 million to generate \$2 million in benefits. That is irresponsible.

In our budget, there are 13 other programs to assist our artists on the international scene. We “deliver the goods” for our artists, both in Canada and internationally, and we do so in an effective, responsible manner that is respectful of Canadian taxpayers.

• (1435)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in making such arguments, the minister demonstrates obvious contempt for culture and for artists. This government has cut funding for touring; it is introducing an unbalanced reform of copyright that is causing a great deal of concern among creators; and it has slashed cultural programs. This demonstrates clearly that the recognition of the Quebec nation and its cultural specificity means absolutely nothing to the Conservatives.

When will this government treat our artists and creators fairly?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the real issue is when will the Bloc Québécois vote in favour of our budget, which provides unprecedented funds to assist our artists on the international stage.

[English]

However, we do make choices. We make important choices across this country when it comes to supporting culture, and I will give an example.

The Bloc Québécois is asking our department to give \$75,000 to a group that is called the Socially Acceptable Terrorist Action. We are not going to give it the funding. Instead we are going to give that funding to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Victoriaville, because we make choices that are good for taxpayers and for culture.

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SENIORS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are crossing the country, trying to explain why they broke every rule in the book in sole-sourcing \$16 billion worth of fighter jets.

They have been so busy that they did not even notice the number of seniors living in poverty in this country surge to 25%. That is not

surprising from a government whose Minister of Human Resources says that helping seniors through a family care plan would be “reckless”.

How did the minister let 50,000 Canadian seniors slip through the cracks in just one year?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Canadian seniors have the lowest poverty rate in the world, and we have taken a number of actions to help them. We have done things like increase the GIS, the guaranteed income supplement, twice. We have introduced pension income splitting for seniors. We have done a number of things that that party did not support. We ask it to get behind the things we do that would decrease poverty among seniors.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing is the government making new bad decisions to justify old bad decisions. It is wasting taxpayers' money trying to justify why it is wasting taxpayers' money.

The Conservatives have done nothing on pensions. They have done nothing on family care and nothing for seniors in poverty; they have only grown that number. They have dug a financial hole that our seniors will not be able to climb out of.

Why are they so ignorant to the needs of seniors in this country?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting Canadian seniors who have contributed so much to this country. We would ask the opposition to do the same.

We have tax reductions that have reduced one million low-income Canadians to the place where they do not have to pay taxes, affecting 85,000 seniors. We have made record investments in affordable housing for seniors, \$400 million over two years. We are providing OAS and GIS benefits to the tune of \$33 billion per year.

What we ask of the member and his party is that they get behind us and support these initiatives.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite what the parliamentary secretary said, this year, the poverty rate among Canadian seniors rose 25%. This means that 50,000 seniors are currently living in poverty. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister is conducting at taxpayers' expense a Canada-wide propaganda campaign to defend the untendered contract for F-35s.

Why is the Prime Minister letting these 50,000 people down while squandering \$3 billion needlessly?

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have some of the lowest poverty rates among seniors in the world. The Conference Board of Canada has indicated that we are one of the lowest or the second lowest in the entire world, for seniors. We have taken initiatives to ensure that seniors do not have to live in poverty.

We have made significant investments. We have taken a number of steps. What we would ask of the member and her party is to support those initiatives and initiatives like them.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary's figures are not up of date.

This is a matter of priority between poverty amongst Canadian seniors or squandering \$3 billion of public money. The Conservatives, who are not doing anything to improve pensions or reduce poverty, contend that our family care plan is irresponsible.

How can the Prime Minister find money for propoganda but not to help our seniors face their heating costs this winter?

• (1440)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me indicate some initiatives we have made. We have increased the age credit a number of times. We have raised the GIS exemption from \$500 to \$3,500, so seniors would have more money. That is more money for 1.6 million seniors.

We have introduced automatic renewal of GIS, so eligible seniors do not have to apply for it specifically. We have raised the age limit for RRSP withdrawals from 69 to 71, and spent \$13 million to raise awareness of and combat elder abuse.

All we would ask of that party and the member is to get behind these initiatives and support us in the steps we are taking.

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GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day Canadians have to make difficult decisions to manage the family budget. They expect their government to do the same.

Budget 2010 introduced tough measures to restrain government spending, including a freeze on departmental operating budgets and a freeze on salaries of ministers, MPs and senators.

Can the President of the Treasury Board please tell the House what other efforts are under way to restrain spending?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we looked at the last four years of Liberal spending when it comes to hospitality, travel and conferencing, and we were quite amazed at the lack of accountability, so we introduced a number of measures.

So far, with measures that were introduced earlier, we have reduced by 30% the spending on travel, hospitality and conferencing.

Also in freezing these levels at 2009 levels, this year alone we have already saved \$56 million, and we have asked for increased transparency and increased accountability. We will continue to save money for taxpayers.

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TASEKO MINES LIMITED

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 13, CIBC jacked up its target price for Taseko Mines and, the very next day, a wild run on the stock caused its value to drop by more than 30%. Someone in the know could have made a killing shorting that stock, and anybody else would have lost his or her shirt.

On November 2, the environment minister's report sank the Prosperity mine, and on November 4 he resigned his job to take another job, where? As vice-president for resources at CIBC, the banker for Taseko Mines.

Are we supposed to believe this is all a coincidence? Who in that government leaked this confidential information?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even for that member that question is quite regrettable. We all know Jim Prentice. We know him very well. He is a Canadian of high ethical standards, beyond reproach. If the member opposite wants to engage in smears and character assassination and innuendo, why does he not have the courage to say it outside of this place? It is just a shame.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is yet another leak of confidential financial information from within the government. On Monday, we were told that the office of a Conservative MP leaked prebudget information to three lobbyists who are close to the Conservatives. By Tuesday it was four lobbyists and yesterday it was five. So much for their credibility.

The leaked information on the Taseko mine had a major impact on the stock market and affected many Canadians' investments. The government has known about this for over a month. Who leaked this information on the Taseko mine and who benefited?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is making outrageous allegations. He has come to a number of conclusions. I would encourage him to table before the House, after question period, the basis on which he comes to those conclusions.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

POVERTY

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the number of seniors living below the low-income threshold, the vast majority of whom are women, has increased by nearly 25% in one year. The current guaranteed income supplement allocation does not allow these seniors to rise out of poverty. The government has to stop turning a blind eye to this.

Why is the government refusing to help seniors rise out of poverty by increasing the guaranteed income supplement by \$110 a month, as FADOQ is calling for?

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, Canada has one of the lowest poverty rates among seniors in the developed world. We have done a number of initiatives to help seniors, like the tax-free savings account that does not affect federal benefits, such as GIS. We have increased GIS twice. We have increased the number of people who can enter on the EI compassionate care benefits. We have \$60 million targeted to initiatives for older workers, to help older workers, \$60 million that the Bloc opposed in this House. I do not know what it has against seniors, but it should get behind these initiatives and help them along.

• (1445)

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 1989, the House of Commons adopted a resolution to abolish child poverty by the year 2000. Ten years later, if one child in 10 is still living in poverty, that means the parents are poor. One reason for this unacceptable situation is the lack of social housing for low-income families.

What is the Conservative government waiting for to have the CMHC transfer these significant surpluses to Quebec and the provinces in order to help build social and affordable housing?

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find this remarkable. We have taken a number of initiatives specifically with respect to housing, through our economic action plan. Close to 9,000 projects are completed or under way, 2,000 of those projects in Quebec. Remarkably, the Bloc opposed every one of those initiatives, including other initiatives we did to ensure housing was available for those who need it most. I do not know what it has against those who are found in the most vulnerable position.

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PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning we witnessed just how uncaring these Conservatives can really be. Only days before the Christmas cut-off of sick benefits, the Prime Minister ordered his Conservative senators on the banking committee to kill a bill that would keep people from losing their homes. This bill was the last hope for these sick, disabled and dying

Canadians. Why is the Prime Minister so intent on hurting these vulnerable Canadians? How can he be so heartless?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, everyone in this place recognizes the difficult situation facing Nortel pensioners and LTD recipients. The fact remains that the situation is the result of a court-approved settlement, an agreement between all parties, which was enacted under the legislation in effect at that time. Of course, the senators have a responsibility to listen to witnesses before committee, and clearly the senators on the banking, trade and commerce committee felt that the testimony led to a conclusion that Bill S-216 should not go forward. Witnesses said that the bill would not help these former employees and in fact would lead them to endless litigation, to the detriment of all involved.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are appointed senators who defeated that bill, and he can give the orders today and ask them to pass it in the Senate so we can help these people. Since he has killed any hope that these people have, the Conservatives had security throw them out of the building. I guess the Prime Minister wants them to get used to being thrown out in the cold.

Bill S-216 would have made sure these sick Canadians had medical coverage and support in the years ahead, but the Prime Minister stood in the way. Would the Prime Minister not set aside his partisan views and help these sick and dying people before Christmas?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find the hon. member's characterization false and regrettable. We on this side are working very hard for some real solutions to this dilemma. What the opposition is offering these people is false hope. The Liberals know, or should know, that their legislation cannot be put into effect to help the people they purport to serve. We are working on real solutions.

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POVERTY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after two decades, it is time for Canada to take action on poverty.

A Campaign 2000 report points out that the rise in poverty has a direct cost in health care, criminal justice, social services, lost productivity and lost opportunity. These problems are systemic and need more than just the "get a job" attitude of the government.

Why is the government ignoring the HUMA report and refusing to deal with poverty?

Oral Questions

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the member and his party talk about the kinds of things that might be done, we have taken very specific action to help those who find themselves in need. In fact, an average family of four finds itself with \$3,000 more in its pocket than the previous tax and spend Liberal-NDP-Bloc coalition's tax everything that is taxable mentality.

We have done a number of initiatives, like the universal child care benefit, to help people out. We have added the working income tax benefit to make work pay and help low-income Canadians over the welfare wall. We have helped over 900,000 Canadians by that measure alone.

* * *

• (1450)

SENIORS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number of seniors who are living in poverty has soared 25% and 80% of that number are senior women. For over two years in this place the NDP has warned the government that close to 300,000 seniors were living in poverty. In response, the finance minister would glibly talk about the tax breaks and about the supposed new jobs.

The finance minister just does not get it. Seniors are not looking for work. They are trying to survive.

When will the finance minister finally increase the guaranteed income supplement to end this national disgrace?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken a number of initiatives to ensure that there is more money in the pockets of seniors. We have increased the guaranteed income supplement a number of times. In fact, we have allowed more money to be earned without clawing back GIS. We have taken these kinds of initiatives, including things like providing housing for seniors and those who are disabled. That party opposed those types of initiatives.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, at a meeting of the public safety committee, we heard first-hand from victims as to why our pardons legislation is so important.

Sheldon Kennedy had this to say, "In my mind, child protection is paramount". He said, "I fully support Bill C-23B, which eliminates the possibility of those convicted of sexual activity relating to a minor of any possibility of ever getting a pardon or record suspension". We could not agree more.

Could the Minister of Public Safety explain the importance of this legislation?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his strong support of this legislation and his strong commitment to standing up for victims.

Yesterday, the NDP public safety critic got it wrong again. Our pardons bill is about victims. It is about ensuring that the rights of a criminal never again come before the rights of a victim when it comes to pardons. Victims support this bill. We call upon the opposition to do the same.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has made Canada the grand champion of booby prizes for doing nothing about climate change. Yesterday, we learned that the government cancelled the most important scientific research on climate change. Canadians have the right to know how global warming will affect their jobs, crops, health and drinking water supply.

How many more booby prizes do we need to win before the Prime Minister appoints a full-time environment minister?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has moved forward with environmentally responsible policy. We have been working closely with the Obama administration. We now have an integrated approach with respect to automobiles, a common North American automobile standard. We are doing the same with light trucks. We are seeking to work with the Obama administration when it comes to marine, aviation and rail.

Canada is the first country in the world to look at phasing out dirty coal-fired electricity plants. That makes Canada a worldwide leader in one of the worst sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the world.

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[Translation]

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everyone involved in the agri-food sector is against the 98% Canadian content standard for the "Product of Canada" label, except for the Minister of Agriculture, who again defended this Conservative measure before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. The Minister of State for Agriculture, who has nevertheless recognized that the standard has had negative repercussions on processing, has failed to convince the real agriculture minister.

Who in this government will stand up and correct the mistake is hurting producers, processors and consumers?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we consulted the Consumers Association of Canada and the processors as well and there is currently no consensus about whether we should exclude items such as salt, spices and vinegar. There is currently no consensus at the Consumers Association of Canada. We are exploring another option that is very promising.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has rewarded a decade of lauded climate science by axing funding. Science, like industry, needs long-term, stable investment. As our young scientists are poached by other nations, we also lose the critical science necessary to form sound climate policy.

Instead of heading to Cancun empty-handed, will the government at least commit to restore funding to the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences?

• (1455)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government values the important role that science plays in environmental policy, particularly when it comes to climate change. There was some one-time funding given by the previous government for the foundation.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. McBean and to receive the foundation's submission. The Minister of Finance will be presenting his budget, as he always does, in the winter and we will see where it goes.

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INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a proud tradition of responding when natural disasters strike, providing immediate relief to those who are suffering.

We saw how quickly our government responded to the earthquake in Haiti. We saw the speed with which our government acted to ensure that our neighbours to the south had the basics. We know how important speed is when it comes to providing medical care, food, water and shelter.

Could the Minister of International Cooperation tell Canadians how we have improved our ability to respond when natural disasters occur?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I announced the Canadian Red Cross first responder initiative. It includes a Canadian Red Cross rapid deployment field hospital, one of only four in the world, the first to be based in Canada ready to respond within 24 hours anywhere in the Americas. It means more Canadian experts ready to provide needed medical help and the training of local Red Cross Societies in the country before the disaster hits.

In fact, a medical unit from this initiative will be deployed to Haiti to help with the cholera outbreak.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just before Cancun the most important climate science research in Canada has been shut down, one research network at a time. Oceans has already shut down and other networks are about to close in December. Climate scientists have been forced to leave Canada to continue their research.

The government does not get it. The environment minister's own political staff spent more money on taxis and limos than any other office.

Will the part-time minister concentrate long enough to look after the needs of Canadians and fund climate change research, yes or no?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP just asked that question. As usual, the Liberal member is following the NDP. Our environmental record is clear. Our environmental policies are clear.

I went on the website of the Liberal member for Parkdale—High Park to find out what the Liberal environment policy was. This is what it said, "The Liberal green shift will move us forward".

Canadians rejected a carbon tax in 2008. They reject it today and they will reject it at the next election.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after January's devastating earthquake in Haiti, Canadians responded by donating an unprecedented amount of money. Yet while Canadians were generous, the Conservatives are still sitting on a shocking two-thirds of this money. Now, as the cholera epidemic is claiming even more lives, these funds are needed more than ever.

We welcome the minister's announcement today, but when will the government finally use the money that is supposed to help Haiti and will it also consider deploying DART to assist the UN with containing the cholera epidemic?

Points of Order

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for recognizing how important this Red Cross initiative is. It means that we have a civilian field hospital that will be able to respond to any disaster in the Americas. It means that we will have Canadian expertise, medical help and technicians who will be part of this team.

I know it will be sending medical units to help with the cholera epidemic. In fact, Canadians want this kind of responsible support and use of their funds to help people—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes.

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[Translation]

MEDICAL ISOTOPES

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one of the recommendations in the latest report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources is that the Government of Canada compensate Quebec for the costs resulting from the shortage of medical isotopes. The Conservatives' dissenting opinion implies that the government does not intend to make up for its mistake.

How can the government refuse to compensate the provinces and territories when it was the government's own inaction and negligence that caused the prolonged shutdown of the Chalk River reactor?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the last meeting of federal-provincial-territorial ministers, this item was discussed. At that point in time, I had stated that I was willing to listen to the jurisdictions in regard to this issue. That is where it is at this point.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order, please. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Trevor Manuel, Minister in the Presidency in charge of the National Planning Commission for the Republic of South Africa.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in question period, the Minister of Public Safety shamefully mischaracterized my position yesterday in the public safety committee and the position of the New Democrats.

Yesterday, in the public safety committee, I stood up for the rights of victims across this country, especially the victims of sexual abuse. I specifically said in the public safety committee that victims of sexual abuse in this country have the right to be heard, they have the right to be informed, they have the right to be listened to, they have the right to matter and they have the right to have input into the pardon process.

I pointed out to Mr. Sheldon Kennedy, who agreed with me, that government Bill C-23B would do nothing to inform victims that their offenders are obtaining pardons and would do nothing to provide them input into the pardon process. All I did yesterday was stand up for the rights of victims.

Today in question period, the minister stood and suggested that somehow the New Democrats got it wrong by standing up for the rights of victims. I would ask that the minister stand and withdraw his comment and do the honourable thing and apologize for misrepresenting my position and the position of the New Democratic Party when we stood up yesterday for victims of sexual offences.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the NDP will stand up for victims as long as there is a byelection in place and it will in fact make those kinds of statements.

However, despite the words that the individual has stated here today, we do know that the New Democrats are all right with hearing from victims but they will never do anything about it. If they actually want to do something about it, they should pass our bill.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to raise a point of order. I would like to go back to the offensive statement made by the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. While he was answering my questions, he took a gratuitous shot at a group known as ATSA, or Socially Acceptable Terrorist Action.

ATSA is the organizer of État d'Urgence, an artistic installation for the homeless in downtown Montreal. ATSA has received close to \$70,000 over two years from this department as part of the building communities through arts and heritage program. ATSA has also been supported by Canadian Heritage for a number of years and received \$7,000 through Young Canada Works.

Not only did Canadian Heritage cut their funding, but the answer came very late, just a week before the start of the installation, which is very important for the communities and in which a number of homeless people participate. Around 13,000 people from the general public and hundreds of up-and-coming and established artists have participated in the last 11 editions of État d'Urgence.

For all these reasons, on behalf of the artists and the 13,000 consumers of art work, I ask that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages apologize for showing his contempt once again for the arts and artists and for adding insult to injury.

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not realize points of order were used for points of rebuttal, but if she wants to have this debate, I am more than prepared to do so.

[Translation]

We are talking about new funds for next year and not next week. As a government, we must make choices.

Business of Supply

Her colleague from Victoriaville wrote to me to ask for subsidies and funding for the 150th anniversary of Victoriaville. We have to make choices. This organization has received funding in the past. It is the 150th anniversary of the city of Victoriaville. We have to make choices.

• (1505)

[English]

Yes, this organization, which is called the Socially Acceptable Terrorist Action, will not get funding this year. Instead, we will be supporting a family-friendly organization and event for the 150th anniversary of Victoriaville. We make choices that are right for Canadians.

[Translation]

The Speaker: That is not a point of order.

[English]

We have had two points of order now that are not points of order, in my view, and I would urge hon. members to ask that their questions be set down for further debate under Standing Order 38. They can have a 10-minute debate at the adjournment time in the House on these subjects and have no end of fun debating the matters. I would encourage that. It is more entertaining than having points of order after question period.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will start this afternoon by saying that last week the government House leader ambushed, for lack of a better term, the House of Commons with two unanimous consent motions, both of which I think could reasonably be characterized as publicity stunts. One was a very unusual motion asking that all justice bills on the order paper be adopted, while the other motion asking to adopt Bill C-10 at all stages was intended to distract from Conservative behaviour in the Senate.

I would simply like to remind the hon. member across the floor and his colleagues that we are here in this chamber working for Canadians. This is serious business and I would hope in the future that the member across the way would treat it as such.

I ask the Conservative House leader which bills the government intends to bring forward for tomorrow and for next week and I hope he can make an effort to ensure, as we approach the Christmas adjournment, that consultations with the opposition parties are conducted in a proper manner. I think he owes it to himself, to his party and to this House. We will do our part, as always, to make this place work in the interests of Canadians.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I respond to the hon. member's question, I want to say that at our House leaders meeting just two weeks ago, the government raised the issue of one of the Liberal members calling a minister of the Crown a "slime" five times.

The House leader for the Liberal Party is seeking to raise the decorum and the quality level of debate in this place. The member is a senior member of the Liberal shadow cabinet. Before I answer the

normal Thursday question, I wonder if the member could update us on where we are on that.

The House leader of the official opposition has also been very passionate in wanting to reduce the amount of heckling in this place and yet we were rather egregiously heckling the Minister of Finance yesterday on Walkerton. I spoke with the member who represents that constituency and that community takes great offence at the continuing vilification of the name of their town. Maybe we will get that next week with the slime comment.

Today we will continue the opposition motion from the Bloc Québécois.

Friday we will debate Bill C-41, strengthening military justice, and Bill C-43, the RCMP labour modernization.

On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday of next week we will call Bill C-49, action on human smuggling; Bill C-47, sustaining Canada's economic recovery; Bill C-22, protecting children from online sexual exploitation; Bill C-29, safeguarding Canadians' personal information; Bill C-41, strengthening military justice; Bill C-43, the RCMP labour modernization; Bill C-54, child sexual offences; Bill C-33, safer railways act; Bill C-8, Canada-Jordan free trade agreement; and, Bill C-20, an action plan for the National Capital Commission.

Thursday will be an allotted day for our friends in the New Democratic Party.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: When the matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Richmond Hill had the floor and there are three minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks. I therefore call upon the member for Richmond Hill.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before question period, I was talking about the valuable contribution that Canadian soldiers and Canadian aid workers have made to Afghanistan.

In this discussion with regard to post-2011, we have talked about the 3-Ds. One of the aspects the government has mentioned is investigating the future of Afghan children and youth through development. I cannot think of anyone in the House who would not be supportive of that initiative. I cannot think of anyone in the House who would oppose the issue of advancing security, the rule of law and human rights, something with which we have helped the ministry of justice in Afghanistan. The rule of law and human rights are absolutely fundamental and are things that we certainly support on this side of the House.

Business of Supply

On promoting regional diplomacy, the government has not been very effective in this area. We have called for a special envoy for Afghanistan, for the region, to deal with the situation, not just in Afghanistan, Pakistan, et cetera. We encourage the government to do that. That is one component that the government has failed to respond to effectively. We think it is absolutely critical to promote regional diplomacy because the solutions in Afghanistan also lie in Islamabad, Tehran, New Delhi and in other capitals in the region. The only way to deal with that, we believe very strongly on this side of the House, is through a special envoy.

On helping deliver humanitarian assistance, I cannot see anyone in the House who would oppose that position. That is something that we believe is very important and is part of this issue. However, we cannot do these things unless we have a secure Afghanistan. Therefore, the training aspects are very important, but again, alongside the diplomacy and the development.

We are living in a fictionalized world if we believe somehow that we can have those other things without security. Regarding Canada's contributions, having seen it on three different occasions, I know that the men and women are making a difference. We believe it and we believe that this kind of initiative is important, not only for Afghanistan and for the region but also for the security of Canadians at home.

We encourage that but we would also like more details on the specifics of this training aspect. We also want to encourage the government to look at a regional envoy, which we believe for Afghanistan is extremely important, and that will help in the future not only of that country but for ourselves as well.

• (1510)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know my friend made many remarks about what the rebuilding process will be like. One of the things I know he would like to expand upon, given his experience in the municipal sphere both as a councillor and as a president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, is the role of local governance and the rebuilding of that aspect, which is not bricks and mortar necessarily, but probably is equal to it in terms of the importance of rebuilding communities.

I would like to know what my friend could add in that regard, which was missing perhaps from his speech and certainly missing in the breadth of the discussion that the government has put forward as to specifics of the rebuilding mission.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. colleague, who was a former mayor, and an excellent mayor at that, of the beautiful city of Moncton, New Brunswick, understands, as I do, the importance of capacity-building at the village level. It is the capacity-building at the village level that is absolutely fundamental.

A country cannot be built from the top down. It must be built from the ground up. Organizations, such as the FCM, and the aid people who we have talked to in the United States know that getting trained engineers, planners and people in the agricultural sector on the ground to help that capacity-building is absolutely critical.

We continue to encourage the government in that area because that is one area of development that is important. It works hand in hand with aid workers because if they do not have security,

particularly in local towns and villages where they need to do the kinds of things that my friend was talking about, then they will not be able to build the capacity for governance.

• (1515)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to get my colleague's comment on our trip together to Afghanistan with the Afghan committee in May and June of this year and the requirement for this mission or the desire for what we are doing now, and his comments on what we heard from everybody at every level, with every uniform, with every civilian outfit, on the consistency of that message.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that in that trip consistently we heard about the fact that the men and women in the forces are making a difference, development workers were making a difference, and that the Afghans really appreciated the approach of Canadians in terms of consultations with village elders and the work with children.

The fact is that Canadians are making a significant difference and they are doing that because of the type of approach they are taking. In fact, the Americans in particular congratulated us and they say they are learning about how to respond in many of those circumstances because of what Canada is doing.

Again, the extension in this case of a non-combat role for training with development and diplomacy simply adds to the successes that Canada has had on the ground in Afghanistan.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments about capacity building, but let us talk about non-military capacity building for a second.

I would like the hon. member's comments about one of the things that is going to happen over the next three years if the government and the opposition get their way, which is that the actual aid component, the non-military aid component, is going to be halved, or will be actually less than 50%. I wonder if the member would like to comment on that and how that is going to help build capacity in the country.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is a good one, because the issue that we need to be dealing with, and I notice that the Prime Minister the other week actually commented on it, is the issue of corruption. Therefore, direct aid to the Afghan government is not acceptable. We do it through other channels. But the point clearly is that we have to build capacity for the Government of Afghanistan to be able to spend money, but also to be transparent and accountable on how that money is spent, because corruption still is the elephant in the room.

That is the one that really we have not tackled, and President Karzai has been reluctant but finally seems to have come to the conclusion that he cannot have it both ways. He has to respond to this issue. We have to weed out corruption at the highest levels, down to the village level.

Business of Supply

There was a time not too long ago when the police officers were not even paid. The money went to their superiors, who basically pocketed most of it. That is an important issue, and again, in terms of capacity, we as a government need to be working with our friends and allies to address that type of issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ) Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my time with the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

I rise today, on this Bloc Québécois opposition day, on a matter of concern to a number of Quebeckers and Canadians, the extension of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan.

The Conservative Party and the Liberal Party did not want to discuss the issue, so this will be our only opportunity to talk about this mission, a mission that the Liberals and the Conservatives have agreed will be extended to 2014.

We understand that the Conservative government has signed a backroom agreement with the Liberals to extend the mission. Those two parties have agreed that extending the mission in Afghanistan will not be subject to a vote in the House.

I am proud to be a member of the Bloc Québécois today. The Bloc's opposition day motion is providing an opportunity for some debate about the mission in Afghanistan.

We would have preferred that the Conservative government introduce it, given its 2006 election platform, which stated that any extension of the mission in Afghanistan would be subject to a vote in the House. The Prime Minister has stated on a number of occasions that the military mission would end in 2011, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs has also made statements to that effect.

It is a shame that we are holding the debate on this mission on a Bloc Québécois opposition day, since the government has made a number of statements and commitments that any deployment of troops in Afghanistan would be subject to a vote.

It is a shame because we are going through a time when people are more and more cynical about politics and more and more distrustful of politicians. They are putting less and less faith in politicians. We are here in the House having a debate that should not be taking place given the fact that we were agreed. Even the Prime Minister said clearly that any extension of the mission in Afghanistan would be subject to a vote. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Any extension should go to a vote because we are elected parliamentarians. There are 308 members in the House, and each of us represents close to 100,000 voters who elected us for our ideas. We have taken part in debates in a number of election campaigns. Personally, like all the hon. members of the Bloc Québécois, I have faced the Conservatives, Liberals, New Democrats and candidates from other parties during these debates. The people I represent in Berthier—Maskinongé elected me precisely because we talked about the mission in Afghanistan in the numerous debates I took part in during the campaign.

We talked about assistance to unemployed people, and we talked about guaranteed income supplement budgets. We took part in a number of debates. I represent the people of Berthier—Maskinongé.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues, the people of Berthier—Maskinongé and the citizens of all of Quebec are against extending the mission in Afghanistan. A survey shows that over 70 or 75% of Quebeckers are opposed to it.

Unfortunately, some Conservative members from Quebec, who are still supposedly in power and still voluntarily toeing the government's line, did not vote for what Quebeckers want with regard to extending the mission in Afghanistan.

● (1520)

The Prime Minister has made a number of statements. In the 2007 Speech from the Throne, he said:

The Canadian Forces mission has been approved by Parliament until February 2009, and our government has made clear to Canadians and our allies that any future military deployments must also be supported by a majority of parliamentarians.

So what is the government doing? It is making deals with the Liberals on the sly and it is avoiding facing Parliament and the people of Canada and Quebec. Basically, it is avoiding facing up to the opinions and values of Canadians and Quebeckers who are against this military mission in Afghanistan.

Despite what the Conservative government and Liberals can tell us today, we are talking about training Afghan soldiers and police officers. When we talked about extending the mission to train Afghan police officers and soldiers, General Hillier clearly said two weeks ago that we could not do so without finding ourselves in a combat situation. It was not a Bloc supporter or an hon. member of this House who said that, but a general who has been there, on the ground in Afghanistan.

Personally, I think something a Chief of the Defence Staff said is more credible than anything we can say in the House. The French army has been training Afghan soldiers for a few years now and over 50 French soldiers have been killed in these training missions.

Whether or not we agree with any of the other parties regarding the mission in Afghanistan, we must debate the issue. Any time we spend large sums of money on military missions and send troops, people from our country, Quebeckers and Canadians, to fight and risk their lives, I think it is extremely important that we vote on it in the House.

There are 308 members in this House representing all Quebeckers and Canadians, yet we are avoiding a vote on this issue. We are asking military personnel to risk their lives. I am convinced that any soldiers who go to give training in Afghanistan will be risking their lives. I truly believe a vote should be held.

The Canada first defence strategy does not clearly define the government's foreign military policy. There is no explanation for such exorbitant military spending.

● (1525)

It has not been defined. Why are we buying so much defence equipment? It is difficult to understand.

Business of Supply

At the same time, and as a final point, of course I do want the government to be able to take part in military missions, but I also want it to be just as concerned about our veterans when they come home, since they often lack resources, especially if they are injured or have a disability of any kind.

[English]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my friend across the way. There were many things he said that I would like to comment on, but I will stick to the training piece.

We have heard over and over again about the French experience. There is no question the French have lost lives in training over there, as we have lost lives in training over there. That is training in the operational mentoring and liaison mission where we are actually out in the field with the Afghan national army, as the French have done in their region. That is the training where we have lost soldiers. That is the training where the French have lost soldiers.

That is not the training we will be conducting after 2011. We will be in garrison doing the same kind of basic infantry, basic artillery and basic communications training, the kind of training that is done in Gagetown and other places.

I would like to know when the hon. member and the rest of his party's hard-of-listening members will finally get that, and stop misleading the House and people into thinking that Canada is going to be into combat training other than basic training.

• (1530)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a clear idea of what Canada will be doing on this military mission, and the reason is that this government has been lying to us since we started voting on the mission here in the House. I am thinking of the government, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who made the following statement:

[English]

We have made it clear that the military—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I would just like to point out to my hon. colleague that accusing the government of lying is unparliamentary. I would request that he withdraw that comment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I was in the process of taking the chair when the comment was made. I did not hear what the hon. member said, but I would remind all hon. members to abide by the rules of parliamentary language.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, then I would just like to ask him to respond to a statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The people who are watching will at least be able to draw their own conclusions. He said:

[English]

We have made it clear that the military will not be [in Afghanistan] post-2011 and in that regard there is no need to have a debate in the House.

[Translation]

That was a statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I do not know whether or not he was lying or whether his statement should be called into question, but that is what he said here in March 2010.

The House is not voting on this mission. The Liberals and the Conservatives made a secret agreement to avoid a debate about the mission. Today, on this Bloc Québécois opposition day, we have a unique opportunity to hold a debate, albeit a short one, unfortunately, because the party in power does not want to talk about the mission.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how much evidence the government needs that the Government of Afghanistan is corrupt. Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index indicates that Afghanistan is tied for 176 out of 178 in terms of corruption.

Back in January or February of this year, I recall that a doctor, one of the candidates who ran against Karzai for president, testified at a Senate committee hearing. She indicated that at least two people that she was aware of in Afghanistan working for the Afghanistan government had purchased half a million dollar homes, one in Vancouver and I believe one in Toronto.

When are we going to wake up and smell the coffee here, and realize that we are doing all this work and spending \$18 billion to help a government that is essentially corrupt?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, we know this government's problems with human rights and justice in Afghanistan. There is a great deal of work still to be done. It could have formed part of a diplomatic or humanitarian mission to support efforts by the Afghan government. The mission could have been an opportunity to strengthen the justice system and promote and protect human rights. That is work that could have been done as part of a non-military mission. But it is not being done. The government does not seem to be concerned about that.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time I have had the opportunity to speak about the war in Afghanistan and Canada's role in this military mission. Over the past few years, it has undoubtedly been one of the subjects most talked about in this House. That is understandable because Canada's mission in Afghanistan has changed over the years and the general public really does not know what is happening over there.

In speeches I gave in 2006 and 2007, I asked that the mission in Afghanistan and its duration be more clearly defined. The following is an excerpt from my April 2007 speech.

The most important thing is to redefine the mandate of our soldiers in Afghanistan. We must be able to measure the progress made. From that perspective, if we cannot quantify the progress, it becomes clear that public opinion will focus only on the loss of human life we are suffering.

Business of Supply

Today, we are dealing with a broken promise. The mission was to end in 2011, but now we are talking about extending the mission. The motion moved today by the Bloc Québécois is a reminder that parliamentarians and the government promised to end the military mission in Afghanistan in 2011 and they must keep this promise.

On two occasions, the Conservative government assured the people of Quebec and Canada that the mission would come to an end in 2011, that the combat mission would end and that any change would be subject to a vote in the House of Commons. It is totally unacceptable that the government has made a unilateral decision to extend the mission beyond 2011. By acting thus and bypassing Parliament, the Conservative government is scoffing at democracy. Parliamentarians embody democracy in Quebec and Canada. It is vital that the government conduct a discussion before such a decision is made.

The Bagotville military base is located in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. Having a military base in one's riding and frequently rubbing shoulders with troops means more exposure to the realities of the lives of servicemen and women. I am convinced that the majority of residents in my riding no longer support extending the mission in Afghanistan. The mission will still be a military mission, even though the Conservative government may call it an "Afghan army training mission".

The mission in Afghanistan is not easy for anyone, not the least for the family members, children and friends of the servicemen and women. This is something that troops know and accept when they make a commitment to the Canadian Forces. If the government is intent on pursuing a military mission involving many young people in an interminable conflict, there will be a substantial cost to society both from a human capital and a societal standpoint.

In 2007 and 2008, I was a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence, which focused at the time on both the materiel and equipment procurement process and the progress of the mission in Afghanistan. Military officials appeared before our committee on a monthly basis laying out Canada's achievements and reporting on the coalition forces' progress.

• (1535)

There was a flip side to this, a whole other perspective. A number of humanitarian organizations came and contradicted the information the military gave us about setbacks and unfavourable Afghan public opinion regarding the actions of countries involved in the war. I have to say that it was very difficult to get accurate information or photos of the work that had been done in Afghanistan. It was a question of relying on the debriefings that were provided.

In May 2008, members of the Standing Committee on National Defence had an opportunity to travel to Afghanistan and get a better sense of how the situation was progressing. During our visit of a couple of days, I had an opportunity to truly understand and see with my own eyes the situation on the ground. We met with the Afghan authorities and observed the difficult conditions in which the civilian population was living, the widespread poverty, and the continual tension in Kandahar.

The provincial council of Kandahar told us one thing that has stuck with me: do not bring your big machines and your workers

who can build roads, bridges, and schools in a flash; leave them at home. Let the Afghan people and Afghan workers build this infrastructure. It will take us longer, but that is not important. The work will make it possible for Afghan fathers to feed their children and families.

After having spent several days in Afghanistan, I could better understand the daily difficulties and realities for the soldiers who are always on high alert. Every trip outside of the Canadian Forces' secure zones becomes a dangerous mission.

When I came back, I recognized that if we do not end this military mission, Canada could be there for many more years. The country ranks low on the human development index and needs to be rebuilt. Afghan authorities and the coalition countries have known for quite some time that Canada was going to pull out of military operations in 2011.

We must recall that in 2007, the fundamental objective of the international coalition and NATO was to rebuild the economy and democracy and make Afghanistan a viable state. To do that, Canada tried to leading role in the distribution of humanitarian aid and the reconstruction of the country.

I am convinced that Canadian soldiers have played an important role in Afghanistan since 2001, but it is time to move on and offer strictly civilian support to Afghan authorities. Our work is done. We have paid dearly in terms of human lives and in terms of monetary costs.

In Quebec, people are not fooled. If the majority of Quebecers want to immediately end Canada's military mission in Afghanistan, it is because they have realized that this war has changed very little.

That is the Bloc's position. Of course we support this motion. We want this military mission to end, but we can imagine a civilian mission to help the Afghan people.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all morning there has been a debate. The government has laid out very clearly and we have argued on many of the points that the Bloc has mentioned. But of course the Bloc members do not want to listen to that. Since this morning I have been listening. One theme is coming from the Bloc and the NDP members who oppose this motion. Number one, that there is no debate in the House and, number two, that there is going to be no vote in the House.

I do not understand. What do they think is happening right now? Right now, we are debating the mission. It does not matter if they use the opposition day to bring that forward. But we are debating that matter. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Defence, the Liberal critics and the Bloc's own critics have all laid down their positions. So, we are debating this matter. I do not know why they keep saying we are not debating the matter.

Second, they say they want to have a vote in the House, that it is democracy. There will be a vote in the house on this motion they put forward. Next week there will be a vote on this motion. Then they will listen and they will understand what the majority of parliamentarians have said. They are saying it is the majority that should be speaking. So, the majority will be speaking.

My question for the member is: Will he accept the results of the vote on this motion next week, which will be the majority speaking?

● (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The answer is yes. We in the Bloc Québécois listen to the people, unlike that party over there, which does not. The people of Quebec do not support the military mission in Afghanistan and want the mission to end.

Canada has invested a great deal in this mission and has suffered significant loss of life. Canada's military efforts are over. Canada must begin a civilian, humanitarian mission to really help the Afghan people.

[English]

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. Right near the end of his speech it sounded to me as if the member was voicing the concerns of people right across this country. That is, when will it end or will it ever end? Is there any possibility?

I have a couple of quotes that I would like the member to comment on if he would.

The first is what the Prime Minister said when presenting his motion to extend the war until 2009:

This mission extension, if the motion is passed, will cover the period from February 2007 to 2009 when we expect a transition of power in Afghanistan itself.

Then a bit later, on February 13, 2008, the Liberal Party's position was very clear when it said, "We say there is no military solution in Afghanistan".

I would like the hon. member to comment, perhaps, on those two quotes and to further talk about whether he thinks it will ever end.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The people of Quebec and Canada are concerned about this military mission and do not support it. The Conservative government uses expressions like "training the Afghan army" to cover everything. All the experts agree that those who train soldiers must go to the front. And going to the front means that resources are lost, soldiers are lost and lives are lost.

The Prime Minister made a commitment in the 2006 election campaign, saying that Parliament should vote on it, and he made other commitments later on. Unfortunately, the Conservative government and the Prime Minister have failed to honour those commitments.

Business of Supply

[English]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to contribute to this important debate on the evolving Canadian Forces mission in Afghanistan, and I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint Boniface.

The motion put forward today is flawed and incorrect. The next chapter of the Canadian Forces engagement in Afghanistan will be a non-combat mission. It is a mission that builds the capacity of the Afghan government to fend for itself in the future.

Similar types of missions have been carried out by the Canadian Forces elsewhere in the world and are the prerogative of the executive branch of our system of government, long enshrined in both practice and convention.

For almost 10 years now, our military has been involved in one of the most complex and dangerous mission in decades. Our Canadian Forces have been working around the clock in some of the most unforgiving conditions on the planet. They have faced a ruthless enemy. It is an enemy who has respected few of the values that we, as Canadians, hold dear and that we profess, as a nation, to foster and promote in other nations less fortunate than ours.

We have persevered to achieve basic rights for women and children and all Afghans to live without threat of bombs and intimidation and to live under the rule of law. This should not be forgotten in this debate.

● (1550)

[Translation]

While on their mission, they have lost 152 of their brave comrades and have seen countless others sustain both mental and physical injuries. But, undaunted, they have persevered in their mission.

They will leave an enduring legacy of hope in a country that was in shambles just a decade ago. This is a significant accomplishment, one that all Canadians should be extremely proud of.

I would invite the hon. members to take a step back and take the time to appreciate what our men and women in uniform have accomplished in Afghanistan so far, and why it is important.

This is an opportunity to reflect briefly on all the good things the Canadian Forces have done and to better understand the crucial gains they have made through their perseverance and sacrifices.

[English]

The Canadian Forces arrived in Afghanistan shortly after 9/11 to a country that was ruled by a despicable regime that harboured the worst of terrorist groups whose murderous agenda manifested itself not only on September 11 but in London, Madrid, Bali and the Philippines, and as we see daily, it continues to plant fear among us.

The Canadian Forces' initial contributions to operations in Afghanistan were critical in driving the Taliban out of its former strongholds. However, the removal of the Taliban signalled the beginning of a larger, much more complex mission.

Business of Supply

After 30 years of war and suffering under the scourge of despotic regimes, Afghanistan was a devastated country, one that could not even provide the most basic of services to its citizens.

The international community could not leave Afghanistan in this condition and risk seeing it revert back to a safe haven for terrorist groups. Canada and our allies understood that this would require a long-term commitment. The International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, was set up to help the people of Afghanistan rebuild their nation. The Canadian Forces launched Operation Athena in 2003 to support ISAF and help provide a safe and secure environment in Kabul.

This proved to be critical for the formation of a *loya jirga* and the development and ratification of a new Afghan constitution. Shortly thereafter, in October 2004, Canadian troops helped ensure the safe conduct of Afghanistan's first democratic election, and 80% of eligible voters participated in these elections, a reflection of the Afghan people's yearning for a voice in their own affairs.

This was a remarkable achievement. Despite the threats and risks inherent in Afghanistan, our men and women in uniform contributed to the crucial first steps in rebuilding Afghanistan's state institutions. In the following years, NATO took command of ISAF, which extended its operations beyond Kabul. The Canadian Forces moved south and established Task Force Kandahar in what was at the time one of the most dangerous areas in Afghanistan, and we were responsible for the entire region. It was the traditional heartland of the Taliban, and the Taliban was showing signs of resurgence.

Our men and women in uniform faced roadside bombs, suicide attacks and ambushes, but they rose to the challenge. With fewer than 3,000 troops, and a battle group of approximately 1,000 soldiers, the Canadian Forces held their ground in Kandahar. Our men and women in uniform prevented the Taliban from retaking its former stronghold and contributed to increasing stability in a dangerous and volatile area.

[*Translation*]

Since arriving in Kandahar, the Canadian Forces have also been involved in a wide spectrum of activities, including non-combat operations. Our provincial reconstruction team, in particular, has played a decisive role in strengthening the Afghan government's authority and ability to govern the region.

Our men and women in uniform have assisted with the delivery of essential resources, such as water and humanitarian aid. They have also helped upgrade the security of key government offices and installations, making it safer for dedicated Afghan officials to build a better future.

They have provided the technical expertise required to build and repair roads, schools, irrigation canals and other key public infrastructure.

Our men and women in uniform have engaged local leaders to build trust across the region and to reinforce nascent institutions.

Above all, the Canadian Forces, in partnership with the Afghan national security forces they have trained and mentored, have provided the necessary security environment for provincial recon-

struction team civilians, international organizations and NGOs to pursue a broad range of development and economic initiatives.

● (1555)

[*English*]

Just recently, they helped complete the construction of seven new schools, bringing the total number of schools in the region to 26. Work is continuing on the remaining 24 schools, as per one of Canada's three signature projects. As Samantha Nutt of War Child Canada reminds us, only seven years ago no girls and not many children had the chance to go to school.

They have also inoculated more than 7.2 million children against polio.

Our men and women in uniform have also helped remove mines from 574 square kilometres of land, which have been released back to the Afghan people, and have contributed to the demobilization of former combatants by collecting light arms and securing heavy weapons.

As we approach 2011, the results of the Canadian Forces' efforts in Kandahar are becoming clearer. There has been a significant improvement in the region's security environment. On many occasions, Kandaharis have indicated they consider themselves to be safer in their communities today. This perception of improving security has been crucial in the development and stabilization of Afghanistan.

They have recently contributed to the success of the election of Afghanistan's *Wolesi Jirga*, the lower house of parliament. On polling day, 90% of planned polling stations were open across the country. This remarkable achievement has drawn heavily from the Canadian Forces' contribution. It also highlights the fundamental role that security and stability play in determining the course of Afghanistan and providing basic services and an effective governance system.

The government and our allies and partners in ISAF recognize this reality. That is why we have put considerable effort into training and monitoring the ANSF. The Afghan national security forces have made tremendous strides over the past few years, but that work is nowhere near complete.

The Canadian Forces possess considerable training expertise and capability. Our efforts in that regard have been recognized by the Afghan government and our ISAF partners. We are, simply put, very good at that. Our NATO allies know this and have indicated how pleased they are with our decision to remain in Afghanistan in a training role until 2014.

The deployment of 950 military trainers and support staff to the NATO training mission marks the beginning of a new chapter. It will build on our previous efforts to train and expand the Afghan national security force, and it will play a critical role in ensuring the successful implementation of the transition process that will enable Afghanistan to assume responsibility for its own security beyond 2014. In doing so, this training mission will help ensure that the gains achieved for Afghans through the Canadian Forces' valour and sacrifices are not jeopardized.

Our men and women in uniform have contributed to concrete, tangible and indisputable improvements in the lives of the Afghan people. Security and living conditions in Kandahar have improved significantly since 2006. Afghanistan is a stronger, healthier nation than it was when the first Canadian Forces arrived there nearly a decade ago.

I have been there six times in the last four years, and I can say from first-hand experience that this is true. We have heard it from people at every level in Afghanistan and it is a fact. I believe, as I am sure many of my colleagues in the House believe, that we cannot afford to compromise our gains. Our men and women in uniform have shown the highest levels of dedication and Parliament should feel the highest levels of dedication to them.

We must build on our legacy of hope that they have built through their commitment. The non-combat training mission is the best way forward. It will help our nation achieve the goals that our men and women in uniform have selflessly worked toward for the past several years: a stable and prosperous Afghanistan, a more secure world and a safer Canada.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I found completely shocking is that while putting our troops in harm's way, who have done an extraordinary job, the government has not backed up its efforts by a diplomatic initiative that is crucial.

I want to ask the hon. member this. Where is the regional domestic strategy to flip elements with respect to the insurgency? This is absolutely crucial to enable us to deal with the challenge. Where is the regional working group that has to get India and Pakistan on the same page if we are going to quash this insurgency? Lastly, where are the efforts to get aid on the ground where it is needed?

The surgeons I met at the Mirwais hospital in Kandahar city do not even have the ability to provide for general surgical capabilities. They cannot even do general anesthesia. They are doing general surgery under local anesthesia. This is cruel and inhumane.

I would like the member to please respond to these questions, which are crucial to the success of the mission.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right. There are many things in Afghanistan that need a lot of work, and we are working on those things. However, remember that we are not there alone. We are there with dozens of other allies, many of whom have expertise in those areas. We are leaving Kandahar because that was a condition of the resolution passed in 2008. We are abiding by that.

We are continuing to work in those areas, along with our allies and the Afghans. Canada has been asked to perform a particular mission and we are going to carry it out.

I would like to touch on something that was brought up. The member opposite stated that Afghans do not need training because if they were good enough to beat the Russians, why are they not good enough now? We—

• (1600)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca is rising on a point of order.

Business of Supply

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I want to give the member an opportunity to retract his statement. He is making comments that are completely untrue in terms of comments I made that the Afghans do not need training. That is completely untrue.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I did not mean that hon. member; it is the one who sits close to him over there. I cannot use his name, but the member from Quebec who is a previous leader of the Liberal Party made comments that the Afghans do not need training. It is not this member.

However, simply put, we are not training the Afghans to be an insurgency. We are training the Afghans to become a professional army, from top to bottom, to deal with an insurgency. There is a complete difference and the member opposite, not the member who just spoke but his former leader, completely misunderstands that situation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

In saying the mission will change, the Prime Minister claims it will no longer be dangerous because it will involve the training of troops—still a military mission, all the same—and this training will be provided in secure locations, in schools and so forth. Former General Hillier has said that it is impossible to train troops for combat without taking part in any combat.

Will the hon. member admit that the French have been assuming this responsibility since 2007 and they have suffered several casualties?

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to answer that question again. We have covered that before. The type of training the French were doing when they suffered those losses is called operational mentoring and liaison training. That is the kind of training the Canadian Forces have been doing up to this point. In 2011, we will no longer do that training. I cannot speak for the French; I do not know what they are doing.

We will no longer be doing that training. It is absolutely false to say that to train somebody for combat we have to be in combat with them. There is a whole range of basic training that needs to happen, just the same as we train in Gagetown and other places to give basic training to our soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen. That is the kind of training we are talking about. It is behind the wire. They do not wear personal protective gear. NATO forces have not lost anybody in four years of that kind of training.

Afghanistan is a dangerous country, there is no question, but the kind of training we are doing is very basic. It is not training with the Afghan army in combat. That is just not true and the opposition should stop saying that.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have made enormous sacrifices and Canada will honour their remarkable contribution by building on our accomplishments in Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

We will be doing what so many of them came to believe was our best reason for being there: making life better for ordinary people, especially women and children. Their valour, their sacrifice and their remarkable achievements will inspire and guide us as we open this chapter of Canada's engagement and begin to transition out of Afghanistan.

I would like to take this opportunity to give more information on Canada's development and humanitarian assistance role in Afghanistan for the period of 2011 to 2014.

I would also like to take a few minutes to remind the House of why Canada's participation in this international effort is so important.

As announced by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, and National Defence on November 16, Canada is building on its strengths and accomplishments over the past years and is committed to helping build a more secure, stable and self-reliant Afghanistan. Canada will continue to play an important role in promoting a better future for all Afghans.

What does this mean in terms of our engagement, development and humanitarian assistance? Many of our 2011 benchmarks have been achieved and some of them have been surpassed.

Canada has also achieved great progress on our three signature projects of building 50 schools in key districts of Kandahar, rehabilitating the Dahla Dam and its irrigation system, and eradicating polio.

Building on these successes, as well as on the needs of the people of Afghanistan, Canada is committing approximately \$300 million from 2011 to 2014 for development and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan.

Within this overall engagement, CIDA will focus on: health, especially of mothers, newborns and children; education; humanitarian assistance; and advancing human rights. On maternal, newborn and child health, it should be noted that Canada will target women in all of its development work in Afghanistan.

For example, as part of the G8 Muskoka initiative, support will be provided to enable the Government of Afghanistan to provide improved nutrition, immunization and the training of health professionals. These investments will help to improve the health of women in one of the world's poorest regions and reduce the number of maternal, newborn and under-five child deaths in Afghanistan.

On education, children and youth are Afghanistan's greatest resource. Canada will continue to invest in their future, building on our significant investment in Afghanistan's education and health systems. To get real change in Afghanistan, we have to nurture a whole generation with new ideas. The kids are the key.

Canada will also continue to play a leadership role in supporting the Afghan national education strategy. This means that Canada will help the Government of Afghanistan improve access to primary and secondary schooling so that more children can go to school, especially girls and young women.

This will also serve to increase the quality of primary education through teacher training and will help foster a safe and secure

learning environment. Canada will work closely with the Afghan ministry of education to build its capacity to manage the national education system effectively and accountably.

On health, building on the successes from the past years, Canada will continue to be a leading donor to polio eradication in Afghanistan through its investments in the global polio eradication initiative.

Today, 66% of the Afghan population has access to primary health care services within two hours' walking distance of their homes. That is up from 9% in the year 2000.

Canada delivered nearly 28 million polio vaccinations to seven million kids. Infant mortality has been reduced since the year 2000 through projects such as Canada's maternal and child health program, which is improving the availability and the quality of emergency obstetric care in 37 health facilities and four provincial hospitals in southern Afghanistan.

Our renewed engagement builds on Canada's experience and investments in Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier, in order to address the dreadful health and nutritional status of Afghan women, which was among the worst in the world, Canada will also support effective and accountable assistance to enable the Government of Afghanistan to improve maternal and child health.

● (1605)

On humanitarian assistance, we should not forget that more than seven million Afghans are still affected by food insecurity, conflict and natural disasters. This situation is a significant obstacle to reducing poverty. As part of its countrywide strategy, Canada will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people in Afghanistan. This will aim to increase the food security of vulnerable populations such as refugees, internally displaced persons, refugees who have returned to the country and other civilians affected by conflict.

We will also assist in the provision of non-food items such as emergency clean water and sanitation facilities, basic health services, temporary shelter and essential items such as clothing, bedding and other basic household needs to vulnerable populations.

Since Afghanistan remains one of the most heavily mined countries in the world, Canada will continue to support Afghanistan's national mine action effort in order to eradicate land mines and provide mine-risk education and training to local populations. This will allow Afghans to live in a safer environment and to use this cleared land for livestock and harvest.

Business of Supply

In conclusion, while much has been accomplished, much remains to be done. Canada will be at the forefront of international efforts to support Afghans in building a country that is better governed, more stable, secure and prosperous. Afghanistan, like Canada, is a country of great plurality and diversity. We must continue to support its people in overcoming the challenges that nature and history have put before them.

I make one last comment. One of my partners as a police officer was Raymond Arnal. Raymond Arnal is the father of a soldier we lost. His son was Corporal James Arnal, who was 25 years of age. He lost his life making a severe sacrifice, but he believed in what he was doing in Afghanistan. I stand here today to honour Corporal James Arnal and to remember that he would never want us to turn our backs on what he was trying to accomplish in Afghanistan. I push the members of this House to support Corporal James Arnal's wishes, to help Afghanistan to become a more secure and prosperous country.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development about what the mission will be like once it has changed.

We all know that it is currently a combat mission. The Prime Minister said that it will not be a military mission, but in actual fact it will be because we will be training soldiers.

Everybody here is concerned about training or building civilian infrastructure. This is a subject with which the parliamentary secretary is very familiar.

How many Canadians will spend their time training the police, for example? How many Canadians will help Afghanistan develop its legal system? How many people on this mission will help develop the prison system? These are all questions that need answers.

How many people will help Afghanistan develop its public service? Its public service has disintegrated. Those are my questions for the parliamentary secretary.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

First, I would like to correct some of what he said in asking his question. When the Prime Minister speaks about this mission, he never talks about a combat mission. It is the opposition parties that continually talk about a combat mission. On this side, we are clear, the government often says it, and I hope they are listening: this will be a training mission and there will not be any combat at all in the training to be provided after 2011.

Regarding the number of people who will be there to provide training, the government has said that about 1,000 people will share training duties in the various areas mentioned by my colleague.

[*English*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know the Liberal leader opened the door to the extension of the military mission in June. We know the foreign affairs minister then started to negotiate with the Liberals. Will the government now come clean on

those negotiations? How many phone calls took place? How many meetings occurred? What else is in this Conservative-Liberal coalition that keeps our troops in harm's way for three more years?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat saddened by the question from my colleague. As I have said, we are talking about sacrifices our military men and women have made and this is not something we should be politicizing.

This is not about coalition. This is not about politics. This is not about whether that member of the House gets a sound bite. This is about sacrifices that our men and women have made. Canadians have lost their lives in combat to ensure that country has a secure and protected environment, that Afghans have the same kinds of rights that we enjoy in Canada.

I will not abandon those soldiers who lost their lives and who fought so valiantly. I will not dishonour their memory by answering a political question like that during this kind of a debate.

• (1615)

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, the member is a very fair speaker. I thank the member for talking about what an honour it is to serve with members such as the member for Edmonton Centre and the member for Crowfoot who chaired the Afghan committee. They both went to Afghanistan. They both understand the mission. The both believe in the mission.

As a member of Parliament who has two military bases in my riding, this is very important. The men and women of the Canadian Forces are not just my friends and neighbours, they are people I see on the streets every day.

Could the member explain how important training the Afghan national army is to the overall mission over the last 10 years and the belief our soldiers have for that commitment to stay in Afghanistan to continue on the memory and the dedication from the Canadian Forces?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I know how invested the member is in this issue. Training is essential. I know our men and women in the armed forces want to impart the knowledge they have on the Afghanistan military. They believe that is the key to fighting terrorism. That is the key to providing the kids of Afghanistan with a future. That is the key to hope and opportunity in the country.

I believe very strongly in the military training of our Canadian forces and the quality and excellence of that training. I am proud to say it is the best training available and the Afghanistan military will receive the absolute best from our Canadian armed forces.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior, Rail Transportation; the hon. member for Don Valley West, National Defence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleague to stay a little longer—I know she is busy—because I will be sharing my opinion on the statement she made earlier. I think we should have a discussion on the matter in order to ensure mutual understanding of the issues.

Business of Supply

I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Joliette on this issue. We are blaming the government for preventing Parliament from voting on extending or at least defining the mission in Afghanistan. I am making this clarification because a parliamentary secretary indicated earlier that today's debate is on the conduct of the mission.

Today's debate is not on the conduct of the mission because that decision has already been made by the Prime Minister. He even announced it to NATO. The government has broken its promises and denied Parliament the ability to vote on extending the mission in Afghanistan.

The reason I wanted our colleague, the parliamentary secretary, to stay is that in my opinion, there is a distinction to be made between a combat mission carried out by soldiers and a military mission for combat training. It is still a military mission. Soldiers will be doing military work to train colleagues, soldiers, people who perform the same tasks they do in another country, but it is still a military mission. Now we need to know what mandate they will be given. That is where the mandate differs and we need to understand each other. We thought the commitment made was for a civilian mission.

I asked our colleague a number of different questions earlier to find out how many civilians from various disciplines will be assigned to the mission. We still do not know of any civilians who will be participating in this mission. When a police officer is trained—and I think my colleague is in a good position to talk about this because that is her profession—theoretical and practical training is provided. Practical training is not provided in a classroom. It is done outside the classroom.

That is why the French military, which took on this responsibility in 2007, has had some loss of life, although not as much as in combat, of course. However, the French have lost some personnel because they have had to expose themselves to danger, by travelling on the roads, for example. We also know that where the operations are taking place now, there are more deaths from mines than from bullets. Most of our military personnel who have died were killed when they drove over mines.

Just because the French were giving training, that does not mean they were no longer engaged in military activity. They were still engaged in military activity, and that is what is going to happen. That is what we are going to ask of our 9,500 soldiers who will be on the ground by 2014.

I know that some members are sensitive and are prepared to try to discuss the situation. Others who are a bit fanatical—although that is probably not the right word to use—do not want to hear any more about it. I know that some Conservative members also want to be reasonable about our future contribution. Should it be a strictly military contribution? We do not think so. Canada and Quebec have done enough in this regard. Our soldiers have gone to the front from the start, and especially since 2005.

● (1620)

The time has come to do what we do so well: a civilian mission. That is why the Bloc Québécois takes the following position.

As a participant in the London and Kabul conferences, Canada must ensure that Afghanistan makes the transition, in as peaceful and

safe a way as possible, to full control by the Afghan government. We know how to do that. Canada invented peacekeeping, and we have a great deal of peacekeeping expertise that we are losing because we are putting most of our forces in combat roles.

Our actions should focus on three main areas: providing training support for Afghan police and helping to set up judicial, prison and administrative systems; reviewing and maintaining official development assistance; and reconciliation and integration. Like the other countries on the ground in Afghanistan, we will continue to maintain a presence, but without accomplishing anything other than what we have achieved to date. We get the feeling that we are not accomplishing anything because the government itself is corrupt. There is general agreement on that.

A military presence is incompatible with the humanitarian mission. For that reason, we believe that police training must be modelled after the training provided in democratic states. In Afghanistan, police forces are accustomed to assuming part of the role usually reserved for the courts. For example, police officers may serve as arbitrators in settling family disputes. A family may be asked to make restitution for the harm done to another family. They may even give their own child to the other family to make amends or restitution for the harm done. That still happens. We have to change this way of thinking. We believe that sending 50 or so police trainers to Afghanistan will be of greater assistance than what we are currently doing with weapons.

We must also focus on establishing a modern judicial system, which is clearly lacking. We have some great legal scholars teaching in our universities. Some are retired and available. We believe that an elite team should be trained in order to establish and maintain a judicial system worthy of that name and so that the police officers we will be training can take people who may have broken the law to court.

This also applies to the prison system. As we know, torture takes place in the prisons. We must also send a team to help them set up a real public service, which will run the components I just mentioned, particularly the judicial system, and stabilize the country. Above all, this will give the Afghan people confidence in their own government.

● (1625)

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listen to this debate, more and more of it is now being focused on development assistance. The hon. member has rightly pointed out that Afghanistan needs a lot of assistance in public service and, as my Liberal colleague said, health care, et cetera.

We need to understand, as I said in my speech, what Afghanistan was 10 years ago and what Afghanistan is today. The Taliban had destroyed everything and now, slowly but surely, with the help of the international community, all of these efforts are now coming together to create a viable state.

Business of Supply

A viable state takes time, money and effort, but one cannot forget the fact that security is the key element. If we close our eyes to security, the Taliban will come back and, if the Taliban comes back, everything we have built and every soldier that Canada and the national community have lost will have been for nothing and we will be back to square one.

I do not understand why the Bloc would not see the development of security forces as another aspect of creating a viable state. It is important to do that. The Bloc members are very good at saying that we should build something this year, but they forget who will provide the security. Building a security force is another element of creating a state.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, which forces us to think about the system over there, which is based on the law of the strongest or, to be more exact, on the best armed.

Children learn to fight each other at a young age. But it seems that our involvement there only perpetuates this system. Instead, we should be gradually putting a system in place with key pillars that will lead this country towards democracy. These are the pillars that I mentioned earlier. They need courts, places where people will see that the justice in a real justice system is constructive and contributes to the betterment of society. That is what we are talking about today.

We have two completely different ideas about how our mission over there should look.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all agree that training the security forces is crucially important but there are some fundamental issues that have not been dealt with.

Within the Afghan national army, there is a very unnatural situation. The leadership in the ANA is actually made up of non-Pashtun leaders for the most part for a Pashtun-dominated army. This is a completely unstable situation. We need rectify that situation by ensuring the leadership is more representative of the tribal makeup of the country.

While the military aspect is crucially important in the scale-up of the training, we need to have an on-the-ground diplomatic mission in order to hive off elements of what is a complex insurgency made up of different groups with different motivations. There is no plan for this.

Does the member not think that in order to support our troops the government needs to work with Afghans and other groups to develop this on-the-ground diplomatic initiative to hive off elements of the insurgency?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member is absolutely right.

Where we go from here must absolutely be up to the Afghan people. So they need the means to take charge. If our role continues to be a combat one, if we continue to attack on the front lines, we

will never be able to accomplish that. Some countries are prepared to continue that work. We have already done our part, especially since Canada was very clear with its allies. We said that we would withdraw in 2011. That was clear. We have always agreed that we would be present, but with civilian missions.

My colleague is absolutely right. This civilian mission must give the Afghan people the means to take charge through democratic institutions and institutions for survival, particularly in terms of health and education.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this extremely important debate. If the government had kept its promise, it would have taken the initiative to hold this debate. The Bloc Québécois is giving members the opportunity to express their views about an extremely serious issue: whether or not Canada should send or keep troops in combat zones abroad.

For the benefit of those who are watching, I would like to read the motion again:

That this House condemn the government's decision to unilaterally extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to 2014, whereby it is breaking two promises it made to Canadians, one made on May 10, 2006, in this House and repeated in the 2007 Throne Speech, that any military deployment would be subject to a vote in Parliament, and another made on January 6, 2010, that the mission in Afghanistan would become a strictly civilian commitment after 2011, without any military presence beyond what would be needed to protect the embassy.

To us, this is matter of principle. There should have been a debate in the House. Moreover, I would like to remind people that the Prime Minister repeatedly promised to hold debates. The Conservative Party's 2006 election platform stated that if Canada took part in foreign military operations,

A Conservative government will...

Make Parliament responsible for exercising oversight over the conduct of Canadian foreign policy and the commitment of Canadian Forces to foreign operations.

In 2006, after coming to power, the Prime Minister repeated his election promise that Parliament would be consulted when troops were deployed abroad. In response to a question from the Bloc Québécois leader, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, the Prime Minister said:

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc knows, as everyone knows, that during the federal election campaign we committed ourselves to holding votes on new commitments.

Of course, he was referring to extending the mission in Afghanistan. Later, in the 2007 throne speech, the Conservative government repeated this promise:

The Canadian Forces mission in Afghanistan has been approved by Parliament until February 2009, and our Government has made clear to Canadians and our allies that any future military deployments must also be supported by a majority of parliamentarians. In the coming session, members will be asked to vote on the future of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan.

That is what was done. I would remind the House that the Bloc Québécois voted against extending the mission beyond February 2009. The mission had already been extended from 2007 to 2009. In the end, it was because of an agreement reached between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, as is the case right now, that Canadian troops had to stay in Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Defence, and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons are all using the pretext that it will not be a combat mission. It is quite clear that they are being contradicted by all officers who have gone there or are on the ground. The government plans to keep 950 Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan to, in theory, train the Afghan army.

We think that 950 soldiers is a lot to give training. As someone else said, it would take a lot of classrooms to use all 950 soldiers. I would love to believe that some of them would be taking care of supplies, maintenance and so on, but most of them would still be soldiers. So that number is very high. If 50, 75 or even 100 Canadian soldiers stayed to give training, that would be plausible, but 950 soldiers, which is only a little less than Canada's current presence in Afghanistan, is hardly believable.

It is completely understandable that the Bloc Québécois thinks the Conservatives are trying to spin this and play with words so that the House does not have to vote. They are saying it is not a combat mission or military mission, but rather a training mission.

I would like to quote the former Canadian chief of defence staff, Rick Hillier, who said:

● (1635)

He gave an interview to CBC News on November 15, 2010, not so long ago, about the debate we are discussing today.

General Hillier said that training and developing the Afghan army necessarily meant going into combat.

He was very clear. France's experience also shows that it is impossible to believe that the training will be strictly theoretical and conducted in a classroom or in completely secure areas, and that it will not endanger the lives of Canadian soldiers.

They played with words; the military mission will continue. The 5 to 1 ratio of military expenditures in Afghanistan to development aid is proof that this is a military mission going forward. The government is spending \$5 on the combat aspect of the mission for every dollar spent on co-operation with the Afghan people or aid programs. That is a huge gap. And I am referring not to the current mission, but to the one beyond 2011.

It is clear that we will be continuing our military mission. It had been decided that the troops would withdraw in July 2011. Therefore, this is a new commitment. Had the government, the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party kept their promises, we would not be here discussing it as they would have withdrawn the troops. That is what they promised to do.

I have some interesting things to say about that, and we could speculate about why the Prime Minister and the government decided to go back on their word concerning the military presence in Afghanistan. I have a hypothesis that I would like to share with my colleagues. I believe that they always wanted to stay longer than 2011, but that they pretended to go along with Canadians and Quebeckers, who for the most part, we should remember, were opposed to the mission. That is evident from all the polls. Between 70% and 75% of Quebeckers are opposed to this military mission in Afghanistan.

I will quote the Prime Minister, whose statement is referred to in our motion. In January 2010, he clearly said that, except for a military presence solely to protect the embassy, it would be a purely civilian mission.

Apparently the embassy requires significant protection. It seems to me that 950 members of the forces to protect the Canadian embassy is a bit disproportionate.

In March 2010, he gave this answer in the House:

Mr. Speaker, I have the same answer that I had last week, and it will be the same next week: Canada's military mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011, in accordance with a resolution adopted by Parliament.

We plan on remaining involved in Afghanistan in terms of development, governance and humanitarian assistance. We invite the opposition to share its ideas on the future of this mission.

That is very clear.

There was also General Natynczyk, and I want to finish on this point because it shows how much they manipulated words to make a mockery of democracy. The general said that military operations had to cease in July 2011, as stipulated in the motion adopted by the House of Commons. He said that for them, military personnel means all military personnel. That includes the soldiers who are part of provincial reconstruction team, soldiers protecting civilians and those training the armed forces. He intended to bring all of the soldiers home.

The top general said that, and it completely contradicts what the parliamentary secretary said earlier in terms of safety. He revealed, perhaps naively, that it is a combat mission and their intention is to see to it that Canadian soldiers find themselves in life-threatening areas.

● (1640)

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Joliette for his speech today, but I disagree.

[*English*]

I wonder if the member does not quite understand the distinction between the two deployments. It is very clear. He mentioned in his own comments that this deployment, which it will take us from 2011 to 2014, will concern itself with governance, and training, in my view, is what will add a dimension of capacity for the Afghan government, for the Afghan security forces in particular.

Would he not agree that that falls directly in line with the mandate that we have discussed quite openly in this House and talked about over the last several years, that this mission from 2011 to 2014 falls exactly in line with that commitment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, once again, all the facts show that this is not a civilian mission and that it is still a military mission. I remind members once again of the comments made by the former chief of staff of the Canadian Forces, Rick Hillier. I will read it in English, so maybe it will be better understood:

[*English*]

If you try to help train and develop the Afghan army...you are going to be in combat.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

He said that on November 15, 2010. I am not the only one; General Rick Hillier agrees that it is not possible to train the Afghan military without having our Canadian troops involved in combat in some way.

I remind members that Canada has the fourth-highest number of troops deployed in Afghanistan and has the third-highest number of fatalities. There have been 152 Canadian soldiers and two civilians killed in Afghanistan. I think that Canada and Quebec have paid their price. It is now up to other NATO allies to ensure effective security and up to us to now work on training the police and providing development assistance to Afghans. That is not withdrawing. It is a real humanitarian mission, a civilian mission.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the Bloc for its choice of a subject matter for today's motion.

Canada has now spent \$18 billion and counting and yet there is no one out there saying that we are actually winning this war. It is pushing a decade now that we have been in there. The United States recently has been flooding the country with a surge of troops because what it was doing before was not achieving results.

The real mystery in this whole debate is not so much what the government is doing, because we expect inconsistencies from it, but it is the Liberals. The Liberals have three apparent leaders. Just yesterday, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, the former leader of the Liberal Party, said that the Afghans do not need training, that they defeated the Soviet Union in the 1980s, that they know quite well how to fight wars and that they do not need military training. The member for Toronto Centre got together with the government to negotiate some secret deal here to prolong this training without even telling the Liberal caucus about it.

I wonder whether the government will eventually come clean and let us know what is happening and what is going on with the Liberals and their secret agreement with the government to prolong this action.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. He is right. There are different lines of thinking within the Liberal Party. I would say their foreign affairs critic seems to be the hawk in the group, despite the fact that the leader of the Liberal Party supported the war in Iraq. We saw where that got us.

The former leader of the Liberal Party, the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, said something yesterday that makes a lot of sense to me when he said that an army that defeated the Russians does not need additional training. The Afghans managed to do what most others have not been able to do since the second world war.

I have a hard time understanding the Liberals. I think most of the Liberal Party brass have always been in favour of Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan. In that sense, it is deplorable to constantly have contradictory speeches.

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to debate the motion before us with regard to the extension of the Afghan mission.

As of Saturday, November 27, 2010, NATO will have been in Afghanistan longer than the Soviet Union had been in its military excursion into Afghanistan. This is a sober reminder of the need to change direction and to change, in effect, what we have been doing in Afghanistan. Sadly, instead of changing the direction of the mission in Afghanistan, the government has decided, along with the support of the opposition Liberals, to continue in the same direction.

We must make no mistake that when we hear from the government that this is honouring the previous motions that we would have withdrawn all of our military by 2011, it in fact is not. Not only is the government breaking its promise to Canadians and Parliament by extending the military mission in Afghanistan, but, instead of changing directions, I believe we are furthering the muck that is the situation in Afghanistan right now. I will explain that.

When I stood to speak to this issue in 2006, in 2008 and in other interventions, I, along with my party, said that it was time to change directions and put a different emphasis on the mission in Afghanistan. We, like others, did not believe that the war in Afghanistan would be solved militarily speaking. We said that time and time again. In 2006, the government, aided and abetted by the Liberal opposition, extended the war but told us not to worry because by 2009 it would be done.

We have heard time and time again from both members of the Liberal Party and the government that this is different because we are training troops. If we look back to the debates and the motions, training of the troops was embedded in both of those debates and in both of those motions. We saw that again in 2008 and in the extension to 2011.

Here we are again debating the extension of the war in Afghanistan, the extension of our government sending our men and women to continue to be in harm's way, and saying to them yet again that this will be the end as of 2014. Why would anyone believe the government or anyone else in this Parliament who said that will be the final date?

It is clear how this decision was made. It was exactly the same situation as in 2005 when we ended up in Kandahar. We all remember what happened there. We did not have a plan to get to Kandahar. We did not have sufficient equipment. We did not have a plan as to what were our goals and we did not have an exit plan. We are there yet again. We know that as of two weeks ago the Prime Minister said to Canadians and to Parliament that was it, that the military mission was done. We would leave a couple of guards in front of the embassy but that was it. He cannot walk away from those words without being held accountable, and that is what we are doing today.

Business of Supply

What has happened is very clear. He did not consult government within, which was clear at yesterday's Afghan committee. The officials who were working for two years in an entirely civilian mission, which we supported and which would have had development, diplomacy and transitional justice funded, were cut loose. I do not even think the Minister of National Defence was consulted on this. I have watched very carefully how this has rolled out and the Minister of National Defence was clearly out of the loop. I think he would have wanted to have seen a little more probing into this.

It is clear that Canadians have a government that is simply sleepwalking into yet another conundrum, as we initially saw when we walked into Kandahar back in 2005-06.

• (1650)

That is sad because clearly the war in Afghanistan is a war where things are deteriorating on the ground. We have the insistence of the government to put a focus on military training. Let us go over the numbers. According to the Pentagon and to NATO, we will have trained 171,500 troops as of next spring. We have already surpassed the goals that NATO had to train troops for this year.

I should not have to tell anyone in the House that that has not been the case when we look at other goals. When we look at the focus of ending the war, the focus that should be on diplomacy, where is the regional approach from the government? It talks about border exchanges in Pakistan. This is a war that affects the whole neighbourhood. We need a regional approach, yes with Pakistan but also with all countries in the neighbourhood. That is where Canada should be focused and that is where we should be putting our resources.

Sadly, as of last week, we have a government that walked away from that approach. It should simply look at the numbers that we now have in front of us: initially \$550 million for a civilian-only mission.

Mr. Speaker, I should have said at the beginning that I will be splitting my time with the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

We have gone from investing \$550 million for a civilian-only mission to \$100 million a year for we do not even know what yet. When we ask the government how much it will spend on diplomacy, it cannot give us an answer. We know we are cutting severely. We know the number is \$1.6 billion for military, which is after, as I have already mentioned, we have met the goals for the military training.

Why did we decide that we would forgo the civilian mission, which our public servants had been working on for two years to focus on aid, development and transitional justice, particularly important for women and human rights protection? Why did we abandon that in favour a huge investment of \$1.6 billion for military training where we have already met our goals?

I will tell the House what many people think is the reason. It is that we decided that it was more important that we satisfy NATO's desires than the Afghan people's desires. It is evidently clear after the Lisbon conference. If we look at the Lisbon document before we went, we had said that while Canada's military mission will end in 2011, Canada will continue to have a development and diplomatic relationship with Afghanistan through the Canadian embassy in Kabul.

Guess what? This document that went to Lisbon was actually a false promise. We knew when we flew to Lisbon that we had no intention of backing that up. The difference is that we forgot to tell Canadians and Parliament that was what we were going to do. For that, Canadians are angry. Even those who might support this mission, they were angry because we had a Prime Minister for the last couple of years who said, of military mission, that all the military would return and we would focus on a civilian mission.

The only assessment we can come up with after that is that we have a government that turned its back, not only on Canadians, on Parliament and on its word, but, at the end of the day, on the Afghan people.

When we look back to this day where we debated what the choices were, let it be clear that the choices that we had in front of us were ignored by the government because the government decided to continue with more of the same at a time when we needed to change directions and support a civilian mission.

I regret that this is the case. I regret that we will not have had a more fulsome debate. I regret that we will not have had a vote that the government would have been bound to. On Tuesday, when we vote, we will not have all members in the House voting their conscience. What we will have are two parties deciding to take an issue and throw it off the table. That is sad indeed.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the Prime Minister said many times that Canadian soldiers would be leaving Afghanistan in 2011, the Conservative government has made an agreement with the Liberals behind closed doors to maintain a military presence in Afghanistan beyond that deadline.

That is what is at the heart of this debate. Neither party believes that a debate, a vote in this House is necessary. This is another example of the fact that the Liberals and the Conservatives, despite being two distinct parties, share the same vision, which offends Quebecers' values.

What does the hon. member think about this attitude of the Liberals and the Conservatives?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, it underlines what we have seen on this issue before.

I thought we were going to change the channel on this. Until a couple of weeks ago, I thought that the government was going to honour its word. I thought that the government was going to come forward with the plan that I have right here in my hand, a civilian-only mission without military involvement that would have put the emphasis on diplomacy, development, transitional justice, and human rights support.

Instead, what we have is a deal that has been done between those two parties to take that focus off the table, and put the focus on military training when it is not needed. That is a sad, sad, sad day for Canada, but most important, it is unfortunate for the people of Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the member that it is a sad, sad, sad day for Canada when members of that party get up and consistently oppose everything.

Let us not forget it was that party that opposed the 2008 parliamentary resolution that was passed in this House. Every time there is something, members of that party will vote against it and say no. Then they pick up these things and ask how we can do development when there is no security. Only he knows.

Let me also say that the member shows up once in a while at the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan. He does not talk to the other members who know exactly how the mission is being run, how the mission is going, not that member. The member will stand here and say that members of his party want a civilian mission and all these other things.

Did the member not listen to our speeches? We are saying that with the extension we will be doing exactly what he is talking about: diplomacy, development, everything. Also, there is the important element of building the state and security services. Yet the member's party will not recognize that.

That is why it is a sad day for Canada. That party is totally out of touch with what Canadians want.

• (1700)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, that was a very measured question, indeed.

[W]e will not be undertaking any activities that require any kind of military presence, other than the odd guard guarding an embassy. We will not be undertaking any kind of activity that requires a significant military force protection, so it will become a strictly civilian mission.

Who said that? It was the Prime Minister. I do not think I have to say anything else.

What I will say, though, with regard to that is that we did have \$550 million going to Treasury Board for a civilian-only mission. I have been saying for years that we would support that. We would have supported that. The only problem was that the government broke its promise and walked away from that commitment.

As to my attendance at the Afghan committee, I have been there more than the parliamentary secretary has, so I need not take advice from him. I actually pay attention when I am there.

At the last committee meeting, we heard interventions from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. He said that I was wrong, that the government is not cutting down to \$100 million a year, aid and development in Afghanistan post-2011, that there is going to be \$300 million and it is going to be in Kandahar.

Guess what? The member has already apologized to me, because he did not even have his numbers right and yet he had the audacity to intervene and try to correct me.

Maybe he could talk to his colleague, the parliamentary secretary, and maybe he could get his Coles notes up to date, because clearly they are out of date and so is he.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a little reluctant to stand. I was enjoying the back and forth between the members. I hope there will be time for questions for me.

I am happy to rise on this occasion to talk about this issue. I listened to my hon. colleague's speech and he is absolutely right. If I end up repeating some of the things he said, it is because they are important.

Before I start reading some quotes and talking about aid, et cetera in Afghanistan, I would like to remind Canadians that if they are not fully engaged in this issue, they might care about the economics of it. As of Christmas this year, taxpayers will have spent \$18 billion. With the extension the Liberals and Conservatives are talking about, it will cost another \$2.1 billion, give or take. It may even be more than that. If they are not too worried about the whole concept of Afghanistan, perhaps people listening or watching are concerned about the actual cost to taxpayers.

One thing that has been very clear throughout the day is the concern in the House and across Canada as to when this mission will end. It is not clear. I have a couple of quotes that I would like to share with the House.

In 2006, when the Prime Minister presented his motion to extend the war until 2009, he stated:

This mission extension, if the motion is passed, will cover the period from February 2007 to 2009 when we expect a transition of power in Afghanistan itself.

I bring forward this particular comment because it seems to me that people who think this mission will never end perhaps have some good grounds to think that way.

On May 29, 2006, the Liberal critic for foreign affairs was talking about the Prime Minister's decision to extend our presence in Afghanistan at that time and stated, "If I had been in the House, I would have voted against it".

Mr. Pat Martin: Where was he?

Mr. John Rafferty: I don't know where he was.

On February 13, 2008, to get a little more current, the Liberal Party's position on Afghanistan was clear. The leader of the Liberal Party stated, "We say there is no military solution in Afghanistan". That was in 2008. If Canadians are concerned and members in this place are concerned, it is with good reason. When will it end?

My hon. colleague was kind enough to point out that very shortly the NATO forces will have been in Afghanistan longer than the Russians were. The Russians knew it would never end and they got out.

I have a couple of rhetorical questions which do not require answers. Perhaps if there is time, we could get an answer or two.

While Canada's military role has been extended for three more years, possibly more, who knows, our aid commitments have been abandoned. That is important to note. They have not been abandoned entirely, to be fair, but they have been cut by more than half, from around \$205 million to about \$100 million.

Business of Supply

We know that the Liberal leadership has recommended the three-year extension of the military role, even though the caucus members were not consulted on the issue. Perhaps I could get an answer from one of the Liberal members later. Was it the Liberal leader's idea to also cut aid to Afghanistan? Was that part of the deal?

We know the member for Toronto Centre was fully briefed on the details of the military extension when he and the Liberal leader were putting on a show in the House and asking the government things to which they already had the answers. Why did he not raise any objection about the deep cuts to Canada's aid budget in Afghanistan?

• (1705)

With whom does the Liberal caucus agree? Does it agree with the Liberal Party leader who said in 2008, "The Liberal Party is opposed to renewing the mission beyond 2011", or does it agree with the Liberal Party leader now?

I think those are all legitimate questions. Not to leave the Conservatives out, I have a couple of questions for them also.

The Prime Minister came to office after campaigning on accountability, promising to bring decisions on military engagements to Parliament and a vote. Time and time again the Prime Minister has assured this House and Canadians that our soldiers would be out of Afghanistan by 2011. Of course, these promises, these principles, are completely out the window.

Why is the government breaking its promise to bring our soldiers home in 2011? Why is it breaking its promise on such a serious and important matter and not bringing it to a vote?

Among all the promises we have heard this week, and promises we have always heard, the most devastating for Afghans was the Conservatives' cutting of development commitments to the people of Kandahar. The Conservatives promised to build 50 schools, but only 19 have been built. They promised to train 3,000 teachers, but we have not even reached half that target. Many of those schools are schools for girls. That was a definite commitment the Conservatives made.

What else are we talking about when we talk about cutting aid? It is not just about schools or training teachers, it is about agriculture, political reform, judicial reform, a number of things. I wonder if the Conservatives could explain to the people of Canada why they broke their word. Perhaps more importantly, why did the Conservatives break their word to the people of Afghanistan?

In spite of all the rhetoric we heard today, the Prime Minister did make a promise, a sincere commitment, to allow parliamentarians to vote on these sorts of issues. That is important for people to remember as we carry on.

Moving on to aid, the \$205 million in aid is down to approximately \$100 million. We have not met our other commitments. The Minister of International Cooperation has been very clear. Everyone is going to be behind the wire I guess. I do not know what that means for aid commitments. Are we abandoning them?

The deep cut in aid is a serious issue. I am having trouble understanding the math. There is \$100 million left to be spent on aid. It has been more than cut in half. We have a signature project, the

Dahla Dam that everybody has heard of, but it is far from finished. I assume some money will go to that signature project. Half of Canada's aid, which is more than now is committed over the next three years, now goes to Kandahar. I am not sure what is going to happen to that. How is that going to be spread out across the country?

Aid is reduced by half and there are still some signature projects which the reconstruction team is working on, not to mention the eradication of polio.

Polio is still a problem. Having worked and lived overseas for a number of years in Africa, I understand the problems with that. We did not expect the polio situation to be finished by 2009. It is probably close to 97% or 98% done, but how can we get it done 100%? We will still have to spend money on that. That is the second—

• (1710)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there. His time has expired for his speech.

We have enough time to have one question or comment. The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly enjoyed the debate today. I have had the privilege of serving as chair of the special committee on Afghanistan. I want to personally thank our government for taking a responsible approach to the withdrawal from Afghanistan. I say "responsible" because of what it will do for Afghanistan.

First, allowing Afghans to secure their own country means that the Afghan forces will be able to not only secure their country, but will also allow much of the development that Canada wants to be involved in to go ahead. It allows the building of roads, hospitals and schools to continue.

What we have done is a responsible approach because of what it allows us to do within NATO. NATO has made this request and we have taken the responsible way of an eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan.

I do not believe the Soviet Union pulled out in the 1980s in a responsible way. It left nothing there when its troops went home. In fact, I would perhaps go a step further and say that not many of the other countries were very responsible at the time either. They did not, in a good effort, step up and help build that country.

How would the member have it? Would it be let us just go home? He knows the development cannot continue in that country if we do not have the security to do it. Does he want to piggyback on all the other countries?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question from my colleague. He is a great chair. I have had the opportunity to be in committee with him.

Let me answer this way. It is not that we are against the aid given to Afghanistan. I personally have a problem right now with two things. One is the cutting of the aid in half. That is disastrous. Second, he says that the security has to be there. The government has promised it will be behind the wire and that is where the security will be.

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:13 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 30, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FIRST NATIONS FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY ACT

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC) moved that Bill C-575, An Act respecting the accountability and enhanced financial transparency of elected officials of First Nations communities, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-575, First Nations Financial Transparency Act.

Why have I introduced the bill? The answer is simple. I believe all elected officials of first nations communities must not only say that they are accountable in terms of their salaries and reimbursement of expenses, they must also take steps to show they are accountable and absolutely transparent when it comes to their earnings as elected representatives.

Indeed, this standard is the very definition of political transparency, not just saying we are clear and open, but plainly showing the people we are elected to represent that we are clear and open. Many first nations elected officials already meet this standard. Those officials who do not meet this standard must be required to reach it. They must be required to ensure that all members of first nations communities and all Canadians can easily access detailed information about the salaries and reimbursement of expenses of first nations and elected officials.

How exactly would Bill C-575 enhance the transparency of first nations elected officials? The answer is clear and straightforward. Bill C-575 would require first nations that receive funds from the federal government in the form of grants, contributions and allowances to publish annually the salaries and expenses these communities pay to their chiefs and councillors.

Private Members' Business

How would the bill compel first nations to meet this requirement? Bill C-575 would require that the annual audited financial statements of each first nation include a schedule of remuneration. As its name indicates, this schedule would provide detailed information on the salaries and reimbursement of expenses paid by a first nation to its chiefs and councillors.

The bill would further require first nations to make their schedule of remuneration publicly available within 120 days after March 31 in each calendar year. After that time, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would have full legal authority to make it public on the INAC website.

That is Bill C-575.

Why am I convinced that this proposed legislation is worthy of support? There are four reasons: transparency, accountability, consistency and practicality. Let me go through those reasons one by one.

First, the bill is a logical step forward in improving the transparency of first nations governments. First nations councils must now provide Indian and Northern Affairs Canada with annual audited financial statements. This requirement is an essential part of funding agreements reached between the federal government and individual first nations communities. First nations prepare these financial statements in accordance with the principles of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants and have these statements verified by an independent auditor who is a member in good standing of an accredited provincial association of auditors.

Bill C-575 is simply a commonsense extension of that already sensible requirement. Indeed, many first nations have already taken the steps outlined in the bill. They have posted on their website financial information that covers all assets and expenditures of the first nation, including money spent on the salaries and reimbursements of expenses of chiefs and councillors. In fact, several first nations go to great lengths to make this information available to community members. They display it on their community websites. They feature it in householder mailings. They post it in band offices.

Chiefs and councillors from these first nations recognize the value in ensuring government operations and the actions and decisions of elected officials are clearly visible to all. These leaders recognize that their citizens share a fundamental right to know how their money is being spent. Unfortunately, not all first nations reach this standard.

Private Members' Business

• (1720)

Current practice is uneven. Some first nations make available information on spending and reimbursement of expenses only on request. In fact, members of first nations communities often ask officials of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to provide them with this vital information. Government officials can and do. However, the Privacy Act and recent court decisions mean that government officials can only supply aggregate amounts of spending and reimbursement of expenses, no details and to the requesters only.

Do we really believe this is the best way for members of first nations communities to access financial information for their elected officials?

Even more troubling, we have all heard reports of some first nations governments that refused members access to financial information. Detailed financial information for the salaries and reimbursement of expenses paid to first nations chiefs and councillors should be and must be readily accessible to members of all first nations communities. It should be, it must be and under Bill C-575, if passed, it will be.

This bill is directed at disclosure of remuneration and expenses for elected officials in first nations governments, chiefs and councillors only. It does not apply to unelected officials of first nations governments. At the same time, first nations will retain full responsibility for determining the salaries and other forms of compensation for their chiefs and councillors. Nothing in this bill will change that.

By requiring first nations governments to disclose detailed information on the salaries and reimbursement of expenses of chiefs and councillors, the bill would also make these elected officials more accountable to the members they serve. It would give first nations members the vital information they need to make wise, informed decisions about their communities. Indeed, knowing how much their elected representatives make in salary and reimbursement of expenses goes to the very heart of political accountability, which is the second reason for supporting the bill.

Accountability is a fundamental principle of Canadian political life that we all know to be true. This fundamental principle of accountability is the basis of laws that legislatures across Canada have passed to clearly spell out how much elected officials and even senior executives in governments earn each year. On top of that, governments across the country have established methods to fully disclose the amount and the nature of expenses being reimbursed to elected and unelected officials of government. We in the House abide by those rules.

All citizens of first nations have a right to know how much their chiefs and councillors are being paid. It is also knowledge that should encourage an atmosphere of greater trust and openness between band councils and members and among community members as a whole. It is knowledge that helps eliminate controversy over compensation and focuses the public discussion where it really belongs, on fundamental quality of life issues such as housing, health care and education.

All Canadians, not just members of first nations communities, should be able to access detailed information on how much first

nations chiefs and councillors are being paid. Some first nations leaders are reported to have said that they are not accountable to the taxpayers of Canada, that they are representatives of first nations citizens, not Canadian citizens.

That view is very short-sighted. Canadians support first nations' aspirations and goals. Canadians appreciate the benefits of accountability and transparency and understand its power in helping to create strong, prosperous, self-sufficient first nations communities and transform the lives of members of these communities. By making first nations leaders more accountable to the men and women of Canada, Bill C-575 would strengthen Canadians' support for first nations governments and assist to demystify certain general, unfavourable preconceptions about first nations.

• (1725)

That leads me to the third reason I introduced Bill C-575. This bill will bring greater consistency to reporting requirements of first nations governments. As I mentioned earlier, current practice is uneven. Some first nations go to great lengths to make available information on spending and reimbursement of expenses. Other communities make available this information only on request, while some refuse members access to financial information altogether.

Why should consistency be such an important characteristic of the operations of first nations governments? Consistent practices and procedures help keep first nations governments transparent and accountable and help make the services that governments provide more reliable and effective.

That is why chiefs, councillors, auditors, financial officers and other key officials from first nations governments across Canada meet together and work hard to share best practices and bring greater consistency, and through consistency, greater transparency, accountability and effectiveness to their operations.

Bill C-575 brings a consistent approach to disclosing the salaries and reimbursement of expenses of elected officials and enshrines that approach in Canadian law.

The fourth and final reason that Bill C-575 should have the support of the House is the bill's practicality.

Some first nations chiefs are reported to have said that the bill is impractical as it will increase the reporting burden on first nations governments. That simply is not true. First nations governments are already required to provide to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada a schedule that includes the money paid for salaries and expenses of chiefs and councillors. Bill C-575 will require first nations to disclose this schedule, which they already submit to the department. So there is no increase in reporting.

Private Members' Business

Another concern raised by some first nations chiefs is that modestly paid leaders are being wrongly tainted by a few who garner outsized incomes relative to the small population of their community. That may be so, but the best way to deal with this perception is not by burying our heads in the sand, but through transparency, accountability, consistency and practicality.

The best way to dispel this perception is in fact Bill C-575, a bill that brings all these elements to bear on this important matter, a bill that is worthy of the House's support.

I urge all hon. members of the House to support Bill C-575.

• (1730)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar for the great work that she has done. I was honoured to be able to second the bill as well.

As a member of the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee I have been honoured to meet some great people who have been involved as aboriginal financial leaders. Certainly one of the things they have talked about and believe is that transparency is a key to ensuring the success of their communities.

I wonder if perhaps the member could share with us her thoughts and tell us why first nations should publicly disclose remuneration and expenses of their elected chiefs and councils.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the support that my colleague has committed for the bill.

Accountable, transparent governments are the foundation of democracies. While many first nations already demonstrate these qualities by disclosing their salaries and expenses to community members, some do not, as I said earlier.

Bill C-575 will require disclosure of elected officials' remuneration in a similar manner to that required by municipal, provincial and federal governments. This is not an invasion of privacy but rather a demonstration of transparent government accountable to the public.

This government is taking steps to bring first nations councils to a similar level of public disclosure as exists in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for introducing Bill C-575.

I would be interested in knowing, in her development of the bill, the groups and people she consulted with and which of those groups actually supported the development of the bill.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I became aware that this was a long-standing issue for many first nations community members who had tried to get access to this information.

I also, in speaking with my colleagues, understood that this was a bill that was very much needed in order to bring about the accountability and transparency that is very much needed in first nations communities so that members can determine for themselves whether their chiefs and councillors are being accountable and transparent through the levels that they set for themselves.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in the bill and I am studying it carefully to understand more about what it says. I think it offers some important

understandings around transparency and disclosure that I think members of the House of Commons need to discuss and address.

I wonder whether the hon. member across actually has disclosed all her expenses and all her reimbursements from the House of Commons at a level that, say, I have done myself.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, if the member would choose to visit my website, he would see that I have.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar for this important bill.

I know aboriginal people in Manitoba have long been calling out for measures such as this. We have even seen initiatives by our own Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs similar to what the member has done.

I want to ask her what perhaps is the opinion of some of the aboriginal members in her home province, which actually has more aboriginal people than Manitoba, believe it or not. I know there is likely very similar opinion in her province as well.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the very important work that he is doing on the aboriginal caucus.

I have heard from first nations community members and non-first nations community members alike that this is a bill that is very much needed. I have received emails thanking me for bringing the bill forward.

We have 74 first nations in the province of Saskatchewan, and there are some shining examples of how a first nation can prosper when they are doing things right and are accountable and transparent.

• (1735)

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to debate Bill C-575, which was brought forward by the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar.

I am speaking in my capacity as a member of Parliament for Labrador, in my capacity as an aboriginal person, and with the experience of someone who has led an aboriginal organization of some 6,000 people for 11 years prior to coming to this House.

The issues and principles of accountability and transparency are the highest principles that one can aspire to in elected office in whatever form, whether it is municipal, provincial, aboriginal or federal politics. There is nothing wrong with affirming and standing up for the principles of accountability and transparency.

In 2004-05, after 18 months of negotiation, collaboration and consultation at the high-water mark between aboriginal people and the Government of Canada, we developed something called the Kelowna Accord. Under the Kelowna Accord, there was an elaborate, fulsome accountability for results framework for aboriginal people in this country, the first nations people in this country. It was broad based and comprehensive.

Private Members' Business

It was not just about reporting a simple number. It was more than that. It was about how to deliver results for people at the community level. It involved the element of transparency, but it was about how to deliver results for people at the community level. The accountability was not only at the first nations level, it was at the government level, the federal government level.

We have responsibilities as parliamentarians when we make decisions, when we dispense funds, when we enter into agreements, collaborative agreements with first nations and other aboriginal organizations.

The accountability was mutual. It was not one-sided. It was not directed. It was not just targeted. It was accountability for all, for aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike.

It also included a first nations auditor general, an independent body funded to oversee the accountability framework to make sure that it was being implemented. This was broad based. This was creative. This was the way forward in terms of accountability and transparency.

When the Conservative government came to power, it killed the Kelowna Accord. It killed that process of accountability. It killed the concept of a first nations auditor general who would have dealt with these issues five years ago.

For five years, what has the Conservative government done about this so-called accountability and transparency in the aboriginal community? It has done nothing and it has said nothing on the issue of accountability and transparency, for five years, either for itself when it comes to delivering results for aboriginal people or in the context of the aboriginal communities themselves.

Let us look at elements of the bill. The member, by her own admission, says much of what is in the bill is already being done. A financial statement approved by a chartered accountant is being done. The member admitted that it is being done already in the contribution agreement.

The member says generally accepted accounting principles have to be applied and there has to be an auditor. It is being done. God forbid the member is admitting that the government does not compel people to comply with those two provisions. In fact, they do in the contribution agreements. The member has admitted as such. The member has said there should be a schedule of remuneration. It is already being done.

There is the element of transparency. How is information accessed and how is it clarified? The member knows quite well that the Indian affairs minister had the power in 2005, when the new Conservative government came into being, and has the power now to make sure that disclosure is there for first nations and for anyone else who wants to go and look at that particular information.

● (1740)

It is not fair to say or to imply that none of it is being done or that it cannot be done, even under existing protocols, program guidelines or, indeed, the law, such as the Indian Act. Therefore, the question is why the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has not compelled this to be done with his own authority under the Indian Act. Why can he not do it? Why did he choose not to do it?

Why now, after five years of saying and doing nothing, do we have a private member's bill, not a government-led initiative around this issue but a private member's bill? This gets to the issue of process and intent, which is just as fundamental. There is the legal duty to consult. The courts have told us we have a legal duty to consult with aboriginal people on issues that affect their rights and treaties. Can the member answer if this has been done? Has the duty to consult been met?

The government, only a few days ago, said it now endorses the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Is this piece of legislation, in terms of the process not the content, compliant with those principles outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? If it is not, then the government's words are hollow.

The government said it wanted to do things differently in the era after the apology of 2008. Is there any evidence in the way the government brought this forward that it is in fact doing anything differently? We will let first nations, aboriginal people and Canadians judge for themselves whether it is doing anything differently.

Let us ask as well whether it believes in the law that says aboriginal people have the right of self-government. What does that mean? I will ask the member to answer that question. Does she believe in that principle? Does she believe in the inherent right of self-government? I would say that the evidence speaks to the contrary.

What is the intent, then? If it is already being done, what is the intent? I would like to give the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar the benefit of the doubt and say it is being done for legitimate or substantive reasons, but I truly cannot find evidence of that.

I believe it is an attempt to brand all first nations chiefs and councillors as somehow corrupt. I believe that in some ways it is making an insinuation about the nature of first nations leadership and governance. I believe that it perpetuates myths and stereotypes in society that sometimes exist about aboriginal people and, in this specific case, first nations people. That is what the evidence tells me. That is what I feel it says, because there were different ways of doing it. There were different processes that could have been undertaken to get to the same place.

In order for a piece of legislation to work, it should be done in collaboration and consultation, and we should support the substantive issues surrounding it, such as housing, water and education. Liberals stand for transparency and accountability in all governments, including first nations, and we will fight for accountability and transparency with respect, in collaboration and in consultation with those affected, and we will do it by being critical of this particular bill and asking the tough questions that need to be asked around Bill C-575.

● (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I am proud to speak to Bill C-575, An Act respecting the accountability and enhanced financial transparency of elected officials of First Nations communities.

First of all, the Bloc Québécois is opposed to Bill C-575, even though we completely agree that every elected official must be held accountable to the public.

In our opinion, the bill goes much beyond that principle. It asks first nations to increase accountability by submitting new reports to the federal government, when the government already has all the information it needs, as stated in the Auditor General's 2002 report.

The Auditor General asked the federal government to meet with the first nations to improve the procedures that are already in place and to ensure that the many reports produced are useful to the community.

When one community submits over 160 reports a year to obtain operational funding—over 100,000 reports per year across Canada—it is a bit simplistic of the federal government that manages these reports to look only at the reports deemed useful for the first nations by the Auditor General.

Bill C-575 does not honour past agreements and past efforts to respect the principle of nation-to-nation relationships. The federal Conservative government prefers to go ahead with a private member's bill that imposes an underlying principle instead of taking into account the work that has already been done.

As the chief of the Assembly of First Nations pointed out in October 2010, Bill C-575 flies in the face of the Auditor General's reports and agreements with the federal government to explore new approaches to accountability in order to achieve better results for first nations. To quote the chief:

In 2005 and 2006, the AFN and the Government of Canada agreed to jointly explore new approaches to accountability to lead to better results for first nations. This work was grounded in our nations' priorities and mirrored the principles of accountability that guide the Auditor General: clear roles and responsibilities; clear performance expectations; balanced expectations and capacities; credible reporting; and reasonable review and adjustment. Canada's involvement in this work ended in 2006 with no explanation.

According to a 2002 Auditor General's report entitled "Streamlining First Nations Reporting to Federal Organizations", 168 reports are submitted every year for each reserve so they can receive funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Health Canada, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

It seems that the number of reports to be submitted has not really changed since 2002 and that the federal government has ignored the observations, conclusions and recommendations of those reports. A wealth of information can be found in those millions of pages, including the salaries of chiefs and elected officials, information uncovered during audits carried out by various departments.

It is important to understand that funding agreements and report submissions constitute transfer agreements that are subject to departmental controls. They are in fact agreements based on accountability.

Reports prepared by the communities are not always useful to them and generally do not reflect their priorities. According to the Auditor General, this is because the reporting requirements are dictated to them, and not determined through consultations.

The report concluded, and I quote:

Private Members' Business

While reporting requirements need to be streamlined, the underlying program structures are an obstacle to a more effective system. Instead of information on narrowly-defined program activities, reporting needs to provide meaningful information to First Nations and to the federal government. Fundamental change is required, and we suggest criteria to guide future assessment of the reporting system.

The report also recommended consulting the first nations in order to target their needs and ensure that the reports prepared by communities are not only useful to those communities, but are not constantly duplicated.

● (1750)

It is clear to the Bloc Québécois that there are a lot of problems with the Conservative government's approach to dealing with first nations communities. What the government is trying to do looks like a campaign to discredit all the first nations chiefs and their communities.

With Bill C-575, the government is trying to distract us from the chronic underfunding of the first nations. We have only to think of the 2% per year cap on increases in education funding, even though first nations population growth is over 6%. Yet the government has fiduciary responsibility for the first nations and manages their assets.

The chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, had this to say in an October 2010 press release:

What is needed is support for First Nations governments and recognition of First Nations authority. Further, we need an approach that will move accountability forward in meaningful ways including ensuring stable and fair funding practices between Canada and First Nations ensuring equity and fairness. These together will increase responsibility and the capacity to deliver good government, effective services and hope for our people....

Let's use this opportunity to kick start a discussion that will deal with the real issues to better ensure that First Nations can be accountable to their people and the government can be accountable to First Nations for its spending and results. Together we can and must chart a path that begins with respect, settles and upholds long outstanding obligations of the federal government, and moves forward to build strong First Nation governments.

The Bloc Québécois believes that the future rests in a partnership that is constructive as well as respectful of each party's legitimate interests. On the federal stage, the Bloc Québécois has made aboriginal issues one of its priorities.

And we are not the only ones. The World March of Women is calling for respect for aboriginal women's rights and is asking states to implement measures to ensure that aboriginal women and children are fully protected against all forms of violence.

I would like to take advantage of this International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women to acknowledge the work done by two organizations in my riding to raise awareness about this issue: Contact'L de Varennes, a women's network, and the Entre Ailes women's centre in Sainte-Julie. On November 12, together with those organizations, my National Assembly counterpart, Monique Richard, and I launched the 12 days of action to end violence against women. And I am wearing a white ribbon in support of that cause.

Private Members' Business

These two organizations are leading the noble fight to eliminate all forms of violence against women. They respectfully and compassionately offer support and comfort to women who really need it.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak to Bill C-575 and I will begin by quoting article 4 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It reads:

Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

It is troubling today that we are speaking to a bill on which there appears to have been absolutely no consultations with first nations in this country.

This bill is, in part, entitled, "an act respecting the accountability". I would argue that this legislation has very little to do with accountability and much more to do with reporting. It would simply add another layer of reporting to bands that are already overburdened with reporting.

The bill would not ensure that chiefs and councils are accountable to the people who elect them. The bottom line is that it is up to the nations themselves to determine what is fair and reasonable compensation. I want to refer briefly to the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website. This website has a couple of items about setting salaries and disclosure of salary information.

On setting salaries, it says:

The determination of an elected official's remuneration in a First Nations community is ultimately established by the First Nation government.

Under disclosure of salary information, there are already provisions for disclosure of salary information. It says:

In addition to federal funding, First Nations may derive revenue from other sources, such as band-owned businesses and arrangements with other levels of government. This revenue may be used in a variety of ways, potentially including salaries for elected officials. As with other levels of government, duly elected officials of First Nations are responsible for determining their compensation. In accordance with provisions in their funding agreements, First Nation councils must provide the Department with audited financial statements annually. Under these agreements, these audited statements are to be made available to members of the First Nations communities.

We can see that there is something in place to provide this information to first nation communities.

It goes on to say:

The Department does not, however, disclose information regarding the compensation for individual Chiefs or council members to the public due to legal considerations including the Privacy Act, case law such as the Montana decision....

I did not hear the member talk about how what she is proposing does not contravene the Montana decision where it clearly outlines that this kind of public disclosure was not appropriate.

We have heard about the Auditor General, but I specifically want to refer to testimony. I talked about the overburdening of reporting. On May 9, 2006, when the Auditor General was before the special committee on Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act, she said in her testimony:

On first nations, we make reference to a reporting study that we did back in December of 2002. When we looked at a number of first nations to see how many

reports they actually had to produce for only four government departments, we found that they had to produce 200 and more reports in a year.

Later on, she said:

Four of the reports were audited financial statements, and another 52 reports were dealing with financial matters. There is often a financial report for each individual program as well as an overall financial report.

She went on to say:

At the time, we said that there really needed to be a streamlining of the reporting, that there had to be a consolidation of reports. We asked if it wouldn't be better, quite frankly, to have people delivering front-line services rather than filling out reports.

She went on to say that they were going to do an update on the status report but that a lot of reporting and audit already goes on in first nation communities. In fact, she confirmed that 96% of all first nations filed their large annual report on time and without incident.

One really needs to wonder what the purpose is of this legislation.

There are already a number of financial instruments in place that govern reporting. I want to refer to the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act. This particular act sets out how grants and contributions are made to first nations and regulations made under this act govern contribution agreements like the Canada-first nations funding agreement.

I obviously do not have time in my short time to go through every section, but section 4.7 deals with accountability to members and it outlines principles of transparency, disclosure and redress. Section 4.8 on accountability to recipients outlines the principles of transparency, disclosure and redress.

• (1755)

Some aspects of the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act outline what happens if one defaults or does not comply with the legislation. So there is currently a mechanism in place that deals with the reporting of various financial aspects of how bands are managed.

I want to touch briefly on a section of the Indian Act. Section 83 (1) states:

...the council of a band may, subject to the approval of the Minister, make by-laws for any or all of the following purposes...

(d) the payment of remuneration, in such amount as may be approved by the Minister, to chiefs and councillors, out of any moneys raised pursuant to paragraph (a);

We can see that in the Indian Act, the minister has oversight on remuneration and this is usually done by a band council resolution.

The Conservatives put together a blue ribbon panel in 2006 but virtually nothing in that blue ribbon panel has been enacted. However, one item on page 8 of the blue ribbon panel said that fiscal arrangements with first nations governments were complex, reflecting not only the varied circumstances of the 630 first nations in Canada, but also that payments to first nations governments are or ought to be more like intergovernmental transfers than typical grants and contributions.

I can assure hon. members that when we are looking at intergovernmental transfers, I cannot image the government asking the provinces to justify how much they pay their premiers, their MLAs or their MPPs. If the Conservative blue ribbon panel was recommending intergovernmental transfers, it does recognize a different kind of relationship.

I want to touch briefly on the AFN accountability measures. In 2005 and in 2006, the Assembly of First Nations made a number of recommendations to the Conservative government in terms of working together around accountability. There was a January 2006 report that said accountability for results. The report used the principle from the Auditor General. The report says that the Auditor General of Canada has defined accountability as a relationship based on the obligations to demonstrate, review and take responsibility for performance, both the results achieved in light of agreed expectations and the means used. The report then goes on to talk about adapting the principles for accountability of the Auditor General.

The Assembly of First Nations represents chiefs and councils throughout this country. Its members do not speak on behalf but they have a role in terms of facilitating. They are clearly in support of the Auditor General's principles. These principles are as follows:

Clear roles and responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities should be well understood and agreed on by the parties.

Clear performance expectations. The objectives, the expected accomplishments, and the constraints, such as resources, should be explicit, understood, and agreed on.

Balanced expectations and capacities. Performance expectations should be linked to and balanced with each party's capacity to deliver.

Credible reporting. Credible and timely information should be reported to demonstrate what has been achieved, whether the means used were appropriate, and what has been learned.

Reasonable review and adjustment. Fair and informed review and feedback on performance should be carried out by the parties, achievements and difficulties recognized, appropriate corrective action taken, and appropriate consequences carried out.

The Assembly of First Nations offered to engage in a collaborative process to develop the kinds of concrete initiatives that would allow all parties to implement the Auditor General's principles. However, here has been no action. It is a bit puzzling why we have a private member's bill before the House that did not engage in consultation, has not examined the instruments that are already available to government to look at that reporting relationship, does nothing to address the fact that chiefs and councils end up reporting to Indian and Northern Affairs and not to the people in their community. It is quite unusual that we would have a bill that could have a profound impact on how people operate and yet has not taken any of those reasonable steps to ensure that it is not opening up something that it simply cannot control.

● (1800)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a proud Métis woman and the only Métis woman here in the House of Commons, I am pleased to stand and express my support for Bill C-575, First Nations Financial Transparency Act.

I must first take issue with some of what my Liberal colleague had to say. It seems that he has forgotten all of the accomplishments that the Conservative government has made with regard to aboriginal people in this very short period of time that we have been here.

Private Members' Business

Although I understand that had the Liberals had just one more term following those 13 years, they might have done something for aboriginal people, I would remind him of what the Conservative government has done in under five years.

We delivered a historic, long overdue apology to aboriginal survivors of residential schools. We implemented the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We included reserves under the Canadian Human Rights Act. We settled record numbers of claims, well outperforming the Liberal record. We endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It goes on and on.

Now, the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, in her very first term as MP, that is under two years that she has been here working on this, she adds to the Conservative accomplishments with the introduction of this long called for legislation.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-575 is an important legislative measure for all Canadians. It is not very complex and rather limited in scope. Indeed, this bill is clear, concise and targeted. It is important because it integrates into federal legislation a fundamental right that all Canadians should have: the right to know the salary of their elected representatives.

Bill C-575 recognizes this right to know by requiring the first nations to publish on an annual basis the salaries of their leaders and the reimbursement of expenses paid to their chiefs and councillors.

● (1805)

[*English*]

As the bill proposes, first nations would now be required by law to prepare a schedule of remuneration. This schedule would contain detailed financial information about each elected official of that community, how much each official gets paid for fulfilling his or her role, how much each official is reimbursed for expenses he or she incurs while carrying out public business, and exactly what type of expenses each official claims for reimbursement.

The bill would require every first nation to make its schedule of remuneration publicly available within 120 days after March 31 in each calendar year. The bill would empower the minister of Indian affairs and northern development to make public the schedule of any first nation.

Bill C-575 is clear, concise and sharply focused on ensuring first nations members can readily access detailed information on how much money their elected representatives earn in carrying out public business.

[*Translation*]

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar for developing this bill, for bringing it to our attention today and for further enhancing the transparency, accountability and competence of first nations governments.

Private Members' Business

I say “further enhancing” because the Government of Canada is already taking measures to promote the transparency and accountability of first nations governments. Financial agreements between first nations governments and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada include provisions requiring those governments to submit annual audited financial statements itemizing all their expenses. These documents also contain tables showing the salaries, honorariums and travel expenses of the elected representatives and the senior officials appointed by the bands.

[*English*]

Some first nations, in the spirit of complete transparency, post their complete audited financial statements on their websites. We congratulate them for doing so, and we encourage first nations leaders to take steps of their own to make this financial information readily available to community members. Yet, as we are all now very well aware, current practice related to disclosure is completely inconsistent and uneven.

Some first nations make available information on spending and reimbursement of expenses only, and only when requested to do so. Some first nations governments refuse community members access to financial information, forcing the people requesting this information to approach Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Indeed, the department is too often made aware of situations in which community members cannot access audited financial statements or schedules of salaries. In these cases, department officials work with representatives of these governments to ensure that this information is released. If efforts to have a first nation release documents to its members are unsuccessful, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada will release that information to those who request it, guided by privacy protections and recent court decisions such as in the case of Montana.

Bill C-575 does away with this inconsistent, unreliable, catch-as-catch-can approach and replaces it with one that is consistent, reliable, predictable and transparent. The bill also clearly places the accountability on first nations governments to disclose remuneration in a manner similar to that of other governments. In fact my hon. friend's bill comes along at a perfect time. The approach to disclosure and transparency set out in Bill C-575 is a perfect complement to the steps that this government, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and many first nations governments and organizations are taking to improve financial operations and make those activities more transparent to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The Government of Canada has made it a priority to make governments more transparent and more accountable to citizens. Governments must report to citizens on their expenditures and outcomes, and these reports must be clear and easily accessible. The Federal Accountability Act is a clear example of this commitment. This historic legislation includes measures to improve administrative transparency, oversight and accountability throughout the federal government.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is also taking steps to improve its financial operations and make them more transparent for Canadians. For years the chief audit and evaluation executive has been conducting audits, evaluations and targeted studies on

departmental policies, initiatives and programs. He then prepares reports in which he presents recommendations to address weaknesses and improve performance.

● (1810)

[*English*]

Recently the department put in place an audit and evaluation committee. Made up of several senior departmental executives and financial experts from outside the department, the committee examines the results of audits, evaluations and studies and assesses actions taken by the department to respond to these findings.

On top of all of that, the federal government and the governments of first nations are working together to improve financial operations and make those activities more transparent to all Canadians, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike. We are working together to develop consistent, consolidated, audited financial statements so it will be easier for people in first nations communities to access and understand band-related financial information and so it will be easier for first nations governments to improve their transparency, accountability and effectiveness.

We are working to implement a new policy on transfer payments, which will help us all do a better job of managing risks, and we are designing and implementing programs that improve the quality of life of members of first nations communities. That is all vitally important work that, when combined with Bill C-575, will help make all our governments more transparent, more accountable and more effective, more equal.

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, I know that some people believe that we should not bother with Bill C-575. Those people think that we should concern ourselves only with improving transparency and accountability at the federal level and that our resources could be better spent on abolishing the Indian Act, conducting an in-depth review of the reserve system and putting in place auditor general and independent ombudsman positions for the first nations.

[*English*]

Let us forget all of that. Let us seize opportunities to make changes on a range of important issues. What was tried in the past was not working.

Let us find ways to make first nations communities stronger. Let us work together to help people in these communities live longer, healthier, more fulfilling lives.

Let us do all of that, but do not let all this work sidetrack us or stop us from making sure that first nations members know how much their elected representatives earn in carrying out the public's business.

Meegwetch.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise tonight to speak to Bill C-575.

At the initial presentation from the presenter of this bill, in the question period, I asked the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar who she had consulted in the formulation and development of this bill and who was supporting the bill, including any organizations. I was expecting her to give me at least one group or person who she consulted with, or at least one supporter. Surely there should be at least one. However, she did not answer that question, which caused me to wonder about that.

We all know how much work is involved in developing a private member's bill. I would have expected, if she has developed this bill, that she would have been consulting with first nations communities in her riding, in her province or somewhere around the country.

As far as I can tell, based on her answer to my question, she has not consulted with a single one, not a single first nation, not a single member of a first nation. As to whom she actually has consulted, of course, we are none the wiser on that point.

Mr. Speaker are we really out of time? Is there not even one minute left?

The Deputy Speaker: We started private member's business at 5:16 p.m., and from the clock I look at, it is 6:16 p.m., and so that would be the full hour. Not to worry; the hon. member will have eight and a half minutes left to finish his remarks.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

•(1815)

[English]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here today to follow up on a question I asked a few weeks ago in the House. Not having received a satisfactory answer, I thought I would pursue it this evening. I hope to get a substantial answer.

An independent study released by various organizations, such as the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Wheat Board and Keystone Agricultural Producers, showed that farmers were being gouged for rail service to the tune of \$200 million a year. Calls for a costing review have gone unanswered.

I asked the minister when he was going to put a stop to this robbery by the railways. I said that the money of hard-working farmers who have already overpaid needed to be returned.

The answer I received was not to my satisfaction. I was told that farmers cannot depend on my party, that the Conservative government usually performs for farmers, acts in their best interests and that the Conservatives will not take any lessons from us. I wanted to pursue this and perhaps get to the bottom of it, now that we are not in the show of question period.

Adjournment Proceedings

I have a letter written to the minister by Mr. Ken Eshpeter, who is president of the Battle River Railway, a newly founded new generation co-op whose mission it is to provide farmers a marketing and transportation alternative while preserving valuable infrastructure.

Although his letter mainly concerns the loss of producer cars, he does say that in the mid-1990s the total cost of grain handling and rail line consolidation was downloaded on to the farmers. Because of that shift in the cost of services, both big grain and big transportation have benefited immensely financially, but farmers have not.

This does not just concern those in the agriculture sector. I recently received a letter from the Forest Products Association of Canada. It wants to draw to our attention the significant challenges the industry faces with respect to rail service and to alert us of the industry's strong opposition to a recommendation by the Rail Freight Service Review Panel to defer for a minimum three year period any legislative or regulatory action on this issue.

The association says that the forest products industry and other commodity shippers have endured poor service and high freight rates while awaiting legislative action to address the lack of competition in Canada's rail freight transportation service.

It is asking us to do the responsible thing and to take action on this.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture stated in a press release on October 15 that the federal government must act now. It stated in the press release:

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture and its railway coalition members have again renewed their demand that [the] Transport Minister...instruct the Canadian Transportation Agency to immediately conduct a full costing review of railway grain shipping. In light of the interim report released last week by the government's rail service review panel, this request is justified....

"The federal government must act now", said Ron Bonnett, CFA President. "Their own review panel has confirmed what we have been saying for the last two years. CP and CN operate in a dual monopoly system and continue to possess market power over many of their customers. The railways have historically fought off competitive measures such as open running rights and opposed regulations to maintain this monopoly".

I am here to get some answers. Hopefully we can see some positive movement by the government. I hope the parliamentary secretary can address this.

•(1820)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member was right in some of what he said, but farmers cannot count on the NDP. As we are aware, NDP members seem to vote against all our motions to help farmers. They voted against our position when farmers clearly indicated they did not want a Wheat Board in western Canada anymore.

Adjournment Proceedings

They voted against the infrastructure stimulus fund. In fact, every area of the country received benefits from the infrastructure fund, yet that member and his party voted against it. They have voted against arenas, bridges, roads and the 430,000 jobs this Conservative government has created.

When it comes to Canadian farmers, he is absolutely right. Canadians can count on the Conservatives to help them and not on the NDP because it votes against everything. I know he is clear on that.

The government also recognizes that both farmers and railways play a very key role in Canada's economic prosperity. In fact, our country was built on railways and the ability to extend and connect our great country.

As a government, we will ensure the railways and the customers who depend on them are well positioned to meet the challenges, not so much in Canada because we do not compete against ourselves. We are competing against other countries such as the United States, the European Union, Asia, et cetera. We want to be more competitive. We want to ensure that shippers and railways work together to create a net benefit for themselves and, at the same time, all Canadians. We are going to continue to do that.

Over the past 27 years, western grain transport has shifted from a regime of rate controls and heavy government subsidies toward a progressively more commercial framework. Fortunately, under this Conservative government that has happened and it has been very successful.

The revenue cap regime was introduced in 2000 based on over a century of evidence of the shortcomings of cost-based regulation, including massive government subsidies and a lack of incentives for railways to invest in their infrastructure. The rail infrastructure was falling apart across the country.

Under previous approaches that kept rates artificially low for farmers, the railways incurred significant losses and were unable to invest in grain cars or rail lines. Substantial government subsidies were required to keep western grain transport viable, including almost \$540 million for the purchase of hopper cars and \$4.8 billion, from 1967 to 1983, to subsidize the railways losses on grain transportation. Imagine the drain on our economy with these massive subsidies.

Another \$1.3 billion, from 1986 to 1990, was spent to rehabilitate branch lines because of the failure of railways to invest in their infrastructure, because of exactly what the NDP suggested, which is to subsidize them. We also spent \$7.9 billion, between 1982 and 1996, to subsidize freight rates. Imagine the drag that kind of thing had on the economy.

The current revenue gap regime creates incentives and it continues to make Canada and the Canadian economy prosperous. We are going to stand up for Canadians and Canadian farmers.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that we hear more of these cheap political shots when we thought we could get some answers.

The government is always saying that NDP members do not support this budget or that budget. When it brings in corporate tax

cuts at the expense of pensioners, students, hog producers and other Canadians who could use this money, of course we do not support a budget. That should be clear.

Farmers, farming organizations and the forest industry are saying they want a costing review. There is nothing saying that the NDP wants to subsidize the railways. We want a costing review to ensure that farmers and people using the railways do not get gouged. They are getting gouged because there is a monopoly. There are two railways that run the structure.

If members were to go to the agriculture committee, I bet every member from every party would say that farmers were getting gouged. All we are saying is we should be doing the review, getting to the bottom of it and helping these people.

● (1825)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, not only do they vote against the stimulus package during a tough economic time, and all the infrastructure across the country, but most of the New Democratic Party, which purports to stand up for rural Canada and for farmers, voted against abolishing the long gun registry.

In my riding, they are going to have to answer to that in the next election, and I think they will answer to that.

More importantly, the government is taking action in relation to farmers. We continually take action for farmers and we continually improve the transportation system, but we do it from a positive perspective. We try to get the parties to work together, to collaborate and get both sides of the argument, and then make a decision that will ultimately be in the best interest of Canadians, Canadian farmers and the Canadian economy, which is simply better for all of us.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 5, I asked the Minister of National Defence why he had cancelled Dr. Zijad Delic's speech at the department's event recognizing Islamic history month.

I also asked if the minister would be willing to apologize to Dr. Delic and to all Canadian Muslims for this exclusion of a thoughtful, moderate Canadian voice.

Unfortunately, we are still awaiting that apology. In fact, instead of apologizing, government members have compounded their error by questioning my motives for supporting Dr. Delic.

I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight regarding a moderate Muslim and proud Canadian, and to ask the government why it continues to favour the politics of division over the politics of engagement.

Adjournment Proceedings

The minister's justification for cancelling Dr. Delic's speech was based on comments made by a former president of the Canadian Islamic Congress. Dr. Delic is not a president, he is the executive director. These former remarks were deplorable and unacceptable, and they have been completely disavowed by Dr. Delic. They happened six years ago and led to the president's resignation.

Dr. Delic is an articulate supporter of Canadian values and renewed multiculturalism. After his speech was cancelled, he released his planned remarks. Since he was silenced, I want to share some of his words here.

He called on Muslim Canadians to engage fully with Canadian society, by saying:

[A]ctive citizenship implies not only that citizens be engaged in taking ownership of their rights, but that they also embrace corresponding societal responsibilities that go beyond just holding a passport, or paying taxes. This level of engagement includes being part of civic decision-making processes, caring about our society's cohesion, and building its human, cultural and economic resources—building its social capital.

For me, this idea could not be more true. So why is this a sentiment that the Conservative government did not want to hear? I believe in a Canada where people of different faiths can freely share their ideas with one another. It is through open dialogue that we build bridges and foster compassion.

Silencing such a voice can only serve to divide Canadians. Dr. Delic recognizes this. He wrote in a letter after his speech was cancelled:

My hope and ambition is to contribute in a positive way to the family of Canadians to continue to make Canada a safe and free society. If voices of moderation are silenced, this will not be in the best interests of the security of Canada and its reputation as a country where people work together for common goals with diverse background. I thank Canada for the opportunity to be part of its diversity.

The Conservative government, the Department of National Defence and all Canadians could have learned a lot if the minister had not excluded Dr. Delic. We must continue to welcome moderate voices and hear what they have to say, regardless of their faith.

Why is this a sentiment that the Conservative government wanted to silence? Why are they afraid of engaging with citizens of all faiths and backgrounds? And when will the government seek to understand by listening to the diverse voices and all the opinions that make up Canada's multicultural mosaic?

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since our government introduced this initiative in 2007, Islamic History Month has been celebrated in Canada in order to recognize the important contributions of Canadian Muslims to Canadian society, the cultural diversity of the Canadian Muslim community and, most important, to share the many beautiful aspects of Muslim culture among Canadians.

The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces marked Islamic Heritage Month with a celebration held at national defence headquarters in Ottawa on Monday, October 4. This celebration included cultural dances and remarks by prominent members of the defence community.

Imam Delic, executive director of the Canadian Islamic Congress, was scheduled to address this celebration. However, a decision was taken by the Minister of National Defence to cancel any role by the

Canadian Islamic Congress, based on extremist, hateful views promulgated by its members and past leader. The Canadian Islamic Congress declared that Israelis over the age of 18 were legitimate targets for suicide bombers. These types of comments do not support Islamic heritage. They simply divide Canadians and promulgate hate and they have no place in Islamic History Month celebrations.

Others in the Muslim community noticed. The decision by the Minister of National Defence was supported by Sohail Raza, president of the Muslim Canadian Congress, who said the following about the Canadian Islamic Congress, I think organizations that speak out against Canadian values should not be invited to any forum". He also said, "The Canadian Islamic Congress has publicly been anti-Semitic. This is not the kind of garbage we want in our Canadian way of life, so we welcome the stance of [the Minister of National Defence]".

Robert Sibley, writing in the *Ottawa Citizen*, had the following to say on October 7:

There's no question the CIC has been inclined to what most Canadians would regard as extremist positions. In 2006, the organization urged the federal government to remove two notorious groups, Hamas and Hezbollah, from its terrorist list, arguing the government had succumbed to the "intense pressure from the pro-Israel lobby." Also that same year, Mohamed Elmasry, repeatedly said on a television talk show that Israelis over the age of 18 were fair game for killing.

Islamic History Month is intended to celebrate the positive contributions of Islam in our nation's communities. The celebrations at national defence focused on the evolution of Islam in the Canadian Forces and the positive contributions of Canada's Muslim community to our society. The two hour event included cultural dances, music and food tasting. It was an opportunity for approximately 40 civilian and military, Muslim and non-Muslim staff to get together to share and celebrate Islamic history.

I was there for part of it and it was indeed an excellent occasion. The event was organized by the Defence Visible Minorities Advisory Group, whose mandate is to promote diversity and inclusiveness. It takes a supportive role and applies its unique perspectives to the job of building, nurturing and retaining a talented and diverse Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces civilian and military workforce.

Diversity plays a pivotal role in ensuring that DND and the Canadian Forces remain strong, innovative and forward-looking institutions, reflective of Canada's cultural, ethnic and linguistic makeup. Working together, we will keep it that way.

● (1830)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed by the answer. I am not totally surprised, but I am surprised that somehow we would equate cultural dances, music and food tasting with the kind of dialogue that I am talking about. Multiculturalism is way more than cultural dances, food tasting and music.

Adjournment Proceedings

We are talking about engaging Muslims in real and thoughtful discussions about the future. I welcome the comments of the Muslim Canadian Congress as well as the Canadian Islamic Congress. They are divergent and different voices. All Muslims do not think the same way, nor do all Christians, nor to all Buddhists or Jews. That means we need engagement. We need to be part of a society that actually talks to each other, listens to each other and puts aside old notions of multiculturalism. We are beyond that. This is 2010. This country has almost a million Muslim people living in it. We have to have—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, my colleague picked up on the music, dance and food, but he missed the fact that it also included remarks by prominent members of the defence community, a number

of whom were Muslim. They brought of course their unique perspective as members of the Muslim community, as members of the Canadian Forces, as people who have made that commitment to Canada to work together with people of all faiths, which we all celebrate, each in their own way.

Together, the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence are a reflection of Canadian society and, as such, will continue to do great work for the Canadian Forces and for the Canadian people and will welcome people of all faiths to those organizations.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6:34 p.m.)

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