



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, February 26, 2008**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 26, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

[*English*]

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

### INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

**Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the following report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States interparliamentary group respecting its participation in the 62nd annual meeting of the Midwest Legislative Conference in Traverse City, Michigan, August 26 to 29, 2007, and the Canadian-American Border Trade Alliance Conference and congressional meetings in Washington, D.C., September 9 to 12, 2007.

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[*Translation*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, concerning the list of associate members of standing committees.

I seek unanimous consent of the House to move the motion for concurrence in the 12th report.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

## PETITIONS

### INCOME TRUSTS

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of the residents of Trenton, Belleville and other municipalities in Ontario who remember the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud was a promise not kept.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts but he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Conservative minority government to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

### ASBESTOS

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of thousands of Canadians who point out to Parliament that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world, and that Canada spends millions subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities in which they live, to end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions from the constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country.

The first petition calls upon Parliament to take action on climate change and that Canada take effective and timely action to meet its obligations under the Kyoto protocol.

*Government Orders*

## AFGHANISTAN

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon Parliament to confirm that our mission in Afghanistan will continue until February 2009 and conclude combat thereafter.

## PASSPORT OFFICE

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition petitioning the Minister of Foreign Affairs to establish a full service passport office in the riding of Simcoe—Grey to meet the growing needs of the constituents in Simcoe—Grey, York—Simcoe, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Simcoe North, Parry Sound—Muskoka, Dufferin—Caledon and Barrie.

## HERITAGE SITES

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have petitioners from Simcoe—Grey petitioning that the Government of Canada support the designation of Sir Frederick Banting's homestead in New Tecumseth, Alliston, Ontario, as a world heritage site.

Additionally, the undersigned petitioners petition the Government of Canada to provide financial support for the preservation of the national historic site and to refrain from destroying any of the eight remaining hangars at CFB Borden.

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## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

## PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I move that the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be concurred in.

**The Speaker:** Does the House give its consent for the motion for concurrence in the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs?

**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)

\* \* \*

●(1010)

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 181.

[English]

Question No. 181—**Mr. Mike Wallace:**

With regard to the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), how many Canadian families are above the Low Income Cut-Offs with the UCCB in place that would have otherwise remained below the threshold?

**Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Human Resources and Social Development Canada estimates that approximately 24,000 families, with about 55,000 children, are above the post-tax low income cutoffs, LICOs, with the universal child care benefit, UCCB, in place who would otherwise have remained below the threshold.

[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

[English]

## AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed from February 25 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in appreciation for the motion before the House that has come forward in a very timely fashion.

This issue is obviously important to my constituents in Pickering—Scarborough East and to every Canadian as this is probably the greatest deployment and greatest commitment this country has made, certainly since Korea.

We have talked in this debate about the ultimate sacrifice made by 79 Canadian soldiers so far in the mission and countless others who have been wounded. There can be no denying the great sacrifice they have made. I think it is fair to say, on behalf of all members of Parliament, that their memory will live forevermore in the hearts and the minds of all Canadians.

Most Canadians respect and support our troops in Afghanistan. This is shown day in and day out by the Yellow Ribbon campaign and the Red Fridays campaign. We have seen, especially in my riding, an outpouring of support by many people on many bridges on the Highway of Heroes when a Canadian soldier passes away or is killed in action. I want to salute the Ontario government for turning that highway into what it has become today.

Not far from this place is the Veterans Affairs building which has carved in stone on its facade a passage from Ecclesiastes in the Bible. It merely states, "All These Were Honoured in Their Generations and Were the Glory of Their Times". I would submit that is exactly what Canadians are doing today for our troops. They are honouring the personal and dedicated commitment by our brave men and women who are displaying Canada's best in Afghanistan today.

However, that also brings into play our national values and our important perspective in how we show support for our troops, especially those Canadian soldiers who have been wounded in the mission.

Many of us in the House have a personal connection. My cousin Mike was badly injured in the Panjwai district in Zhari last year. I spoke to him before this debate and he is doing much better.

*Government Orders*

With the outpouring of support of so many in terms of the wounded warriors fund, it is clear that we are demonstrating, day in and day out, that we have not forgotten those who are over there.

Let us not forget that in the past year it has required the opposition and some parliamentarians to bring forward some of the short-comings, particularly for wounded soldiers and those who have passed on. Last year, a father, unfortunately, had to come to Parliament Hill to ask that his son's funeral costs be covered. That should never have happened. I think I join with all members of Parliament in saying that something like that should never happen again.

Wounded soldiers were told that their pay would be docked because they had either stepped on a landmine, were shot or were wounded in battle. The first thing they were told upon their return to Landstuhl, Germany, was that they would receive medical treatment, there would be questions of compensation down the road but that the money promised by the Canadian government in order to get them over there and to be compensated for the harsh conditions was simply gone. It took this Liberal Party to stand up for those troops at the time.

I also have concerns with respect to things such as the veterans independence program. The Prime Minister made a commitment to Joyce Carter and to thousands of widows of those who saved the country in its time of need and saved the country billions of dollars in terms of looking after our veterans and keeping them in their homes. He made a commitment that they could maintain their properties and do a bit of work on the inside, particularly for those spouses in their twilight years. That was a promise to all widows but that has not been fulfilled, notwithstanding the fact that it was a commitment made directly by the Prime Minister.

• (1015)

It is also important for us to recognize that the number of wounded soldiers returning from Afghanistan would commit us to ensuring that the excellence of the service is beyond question. It has dawned on this member of Parliament and I think all members on this side that wounded soldiers who return may very well find themselves in a situation where they no longer receive a pension for life. As well, this should be of concern to all members in this House.

Wounds may be substantial and there may be long term implications. We have heard about this from the hon. member from Sackville, Nova Scotia. He has spoken many times about the traumatic implications of post-traumatic stress disorder. These problems are all facets of a bigger problem. They cannot be resolved by the government simply cutting a cheque for \$50,000 or \$100,000 depending on the severity of the wound and then writing off the wounded forever.

These wounded soldiers who are 19, 20, 21 or 22 years old need to have the assurance that they will have, for the rest of their lives, a pension that respects and recognizes the great contribution they have made. For a nation that is as blessed as ours and that has people who make those kinds of commitments, I think we can keep faith with those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice and those who have been wounded by ensuring that for the rest of their lives they will not go without.

To put it more in perspective for Canadians who may be watching this important debate unfolding today, I ask them to think about it this way. For a 21 year old, \$50,000 may sound like a lot of money, but in 20 or 30 years that money will be gone. An annual monthly or weekly cheque for the rest of their lives not only gives them security at the bank, but in the long term it does pay them a far greater amount. And why not?

I have many veterans in my riding, as does the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, veterans such as Ken May, who was wounded in Italy in 1943. He has had a pension since 1945 when he was discharged. It seems to me that this cumulative effect over the years is far greater than simply giving a couple of dollars here and there, getting rid of the problem and moving on.

Whatever the analysis is for the future of the Department of Veterans Affairs, my suggestion is that it should be strengthened, not weakened. It should not be decommissioned. It should not cease functioning because that department will serve today's veterans tomorrow and for years to come, as well as their families.

Our commitment in Afghanistan is vital, but we have to also put it in context. The bigger problem we are facing is with the entire Middle East, not only with Afghanistan. It is incumbent on parliamentarians to understand that we will not resolve all the problems of the Middle East overnight, but one thing is very clear. For the life of me I cannot understand why the government has disengaged in its activities with respect to the Middle East.

Canada used to have a very proud tradition of being able to engage all nations. We were respected and highly coveted for our opinions because we tried to provide even-handedness in our approaches. We did not do as the Conservative government has done over the past couple of years and take sides in a particular debate.

More importantly, with respect to the incursion into Lebanon, we never put ourselves in a situation where we would call something a "measured" response when in fact the rest of the world did not. We understand the tensions there. We have to understand those living in oppressed conditions, whether that is in Palestine, Iraq or Afghanistan. We may not be able to settle all the world's problems, but we must continue to strive for the just and durable peace that King Hussein talked about in the many peace conferences that have been tried and the many that have failed.

However, we must also take into account the origins of why we are in Afghanistan. Many of us were here on September 11, 2001, when the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania took place. It was a very dark moment. The western world had finally understood what the problems were. I was helpful in getting a plaque here to recognize the 29 Canadians who were injured or killed in that tragedy. Behind that tragedy exists a long litany of concerns. Humiliation in that part of the world can only be addressed by a solid foreign policy that continues to engage all players evenly and fairly but firmly.

*Government Orders*

While we talk about Afghanistan and the continuation of the role, which I do support, and I am also grateful for the work of John Manley, I also recognize that we have a far greater responsibility to look at the bigger picture, to go deeper and understand the reverberations when millions of children were killed in Iraq through bombings, starvation and a forced embargo. We are talking about humility, we are talking about humiliation, and we are talking about injustice.

This House cannot do what happened in 1979. We made commitments to the mujahedeen in Afghanistan when the Russians were pushed out, but we forgot about them. Economic depression led to the kind of regime that was installed there and which we had to remove. We must ensure that our commitment to that country, to the world and to world peace through the Middle East continues to be seamless and is applied in a way that is both fair and even-handed.

• (1020)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. friend. I have a couple of quick comments and a question.

With regard to Canada's place in the world and the respect that we have in the world today, I would suggest to the hon. member that the level of respect for Canada has gone up immeasurably since Canada decided to make the responsibility to protect more than just words. In fact, we back it up with actions. My other comment is that we will always take sides with a democracy against terrorist acts conducted by a stateless organization. Let there be no doubt about that.

I want to go back to some of his earlier comments, though, with regard to the fluid and changing situation in which our veterans find themselves and in which the military is finding itself, with more wounded and people who need more services when they come back. Will he acknowledge that a lot of those things are rapidly changing and are fluid and that given the changes that are happening so quickly the fact is that we will probably always be playing a bit of catch-up? Will he acknowledge, though, that when those situations such as the issues of combat pay and funeral expenses came to light, they were acted on very quickly by the Department of National Defence and by the Canadian Forces and that in fact the government has reacted to those things in a positive manner?

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect to the member, and I know the work that he has done on behalf of our armed forces, it took the opposition, this member and our critics to force the government to acknowledge after several weeks that wounded soldiers were having their pay docked simply for being wounded.

We had the embarrassing spectacle of a father who had to come here, cap in hand, and ask to please be paid for extra funeral expenses. It took the national media to expose these things and to expose the shortcomings in the department. I do not mean to be critical of the member, but let us look at how long it took to get these things resolved. It was not done as quickly as he has suggested. It took dragging and screaming. It took getting the former defence minister to acknowledge it.

The hon. member also talked about the issue of the Middle East and our position in the world. He sits right beside the Minister of Foreign Affairs who understands full well, and who should

understand full well, the importance of diplomacy, the importance of how to deal with a people who have been oppressed and betrayed.

We are not just talking about Afghanistan. We were so concerned about Afghanistan many years ago but we simply forgot. At the end of my comments, as I think the member will recall, I said that Afghanistan was virtually abandoned by the world. We made promises that when Afghanistan got rid of the Russians we would invest and build the country's economy. Successive presidents and the UN made these comments, these commitments and undertakings. The moment the Russians left, so did our commitment.

I am saying for the hon. member from Edmonton, the parliamentary secretary, that we cannot confine what we are doing in Afghanistan to doing it in complete isolation and indifference to the rest of the Middle East. It is extremely important to recognize what has happened in Palestine and what continues to happen in Iraq. It is extremely important to recognize what we did over the past 10 or 15 years and how the people in Iraq felt when half a million of their children starved. It was not Canada's doing, but we have to acknowledge why we are in Afghanistan and what the response was. We also have to engage Pakistan. There is a number of countries, of course, and we are hoping for greater promise there.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member is the expert in Parliament on how Canadians are treated overseas. I would like to ask him if he wants to go into any more detail on how they are treated in Afghanistan or on any other urgent issues we have that are related to this right now.

• (1025)

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question from the hon. member for Yukon. I am glad to see that the motion does in fact cover the issue of detainees. It covers a substantial number of questions, but for Canadians who are in fact lost in other nations, clearly there are a number of questions that need to be raised, and for Canadians who find themselves in difficulty with respect to Afghanistan in particular.

One would hope that in days to come in the building and sustaining of civil government the Karzai government will do plenty to ensure there is a sense that it will be able to acquire this kind of vigilance and legal enforcement of laws as well as the protection of its own citizens and the observance of human rights.

I could go on at great length with respect to Canadians abroad. I will leave that to the minister, but my experience has always suggested that Canada has a very active foreign service. It had leadership, although I am not sure that leadership is there now even though the government has the financial and legislative wherewithal to act. It is time for Canadians to recognize that what we are doing in Afghanistan also has a very important reflection on what we do internationally, especially in the Middle East.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address the House today concerning the future of our mission in Afghanistan. Our party is as proud of Canada's mission in Afghanistan today as we have been since the day the former Liberal government decided to send troops there in 2002.

We believed at the time, as we do today, that the nature of the conflict justified the mission, a mission rooted in Canada's foreign policy and defence traditions. The men and women in uniform who are serving in Afghanistan have repeatedly proven that they are well trained, disciplined and, above all, courageous. They keep our diplomats and our humanitarian aid specialists safe, and they are essential to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. I will elaborate on that later with a concrete example.

We should be proud—very proud—of our contribution and our achievements in Afghanistan. Our government would not suggest that Canada remain there if we were not convinced that our efforts are contributing to progress and that our goals are achievable.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I had the opportunity to visit Afghanistan, where I saw first-hand the real progress we are making.

[English]

We have all heard it many times before, but it needs to be repeated again. There can be no development without security.

There are international efforts in Afghanistan. As a result, Afghanistan has been able to begin to rebuild itself. We are helping with security. We are helping to create a vital economic environment for the reconstruction.

I would like to provide the House with one example of this. It involves a heroic non-profit organization called the Turquoise Mountain Foundation.

When I was in Afghanistan, I had the pleasure of personally inspecting the foundation's work. The foundation is helping to regenerate the historic commercial centre of Kabul. The foundation is helping this area become once again a bustling place of commerce. It is providing basic services and saving historic buildings as well as constructing a new bazaar and galleries for traditional craft businesses.

The efforts of our Canadian Forces and others to create security in Afghanistan are helping the foundation's work. The foundation's work would be much more difficult, perhaps even impossible, without the presence of our military.

Canada is pursuing an integrated approach in Afghanistan. We draw on the skills and the resources of departments across government. This includes foreign affairs, defence, CIDA, the RCMP, justice and Correctional Service Canada. By doing so, we can maximize our capacity and our impact on the ground for the Afghan people.

Our approach recognizes the interrelated nature of governance, security, and economic and social development. These various Canadian government departments work together to pursue a shared goal. The goal is very simple. It is to pursue development in all of these areas simultaneously.

Our government has made clear our intention to move forward on the future of Canada's mission.

On the question of extending the mission, I am pleased to observe that common ground has started to emerge. This is thanks in many ways to the Manley panel's recommendations. It has paved the way for the bipartisan parliamentary consensus that appears to be emerging.

Just a few days ago our government issued a revised motion on the future of the Afghanistan mission. This revised motion incorporates large elements of the Liberal response to our original motion. The revised motion embraces an even wider expanse of common ground than before. It acknowledges what is required for Canada's mission to succeed in Afghanistan.

The government and the official opposition agree on two important points. First, we agree that Canada should continue the military mission until 2011; and second, we should leave operational decisions to our commanders on the ground in Afghanistan.

We all know that without security there can be no aid or development, not today, and not for some time in the future. Without aid and development there can be no security in the future. We know that security is the prerequisite for development.

● (1030)

[Translation]

This is a Canadian position. Our position is clear, well thought out, and neither Conservative nor Liberal, but truly Canadian. We believe that a majority of the people elected to represent Canadians will support this position. We believe that a majority of members of Parliament should support it.

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the remarks made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I am a little surprised about this position.

The Bloc's position, which it has reiterated a number of times, is that Canada should withdraw from combat missions in Afghanistan in February 2009, as NATO had said.

Now we see that they want to push the end of the mission much further, to 2011. How will the government explain that to the public?

I will restate our position. We had a week to visit our ridings, and the hon. minister probably paid a visit to his riding as well. The majority of Quebeckers are telling us that we have no reason to be there, and that we should not still be there.

How will we explain that not only do we no longer have a reason to be there, but also that we are staying until 2011? This is what people do not understand. But it is the position we will have to defend if the government motion is supported by this House.

● (1035)

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Mr. Speaker, Quebeckers, like all Canadians, are very proud of this mission. They support this government's efforts and especially those of the Canadian army to establish security in Afghanistan.

*Government Orders*

That said, we will certainly have to provide more training for the Afghan national police and the national army, so that Afghans can take control of their own destiny and establish security for their own people.

I think that Quebeckers, like all Canadians, understand that. We will focus on training the Afghan army and police force to ensure that when we leave the country in 2011, our work will be done and Afghans will be able to take charge of their own security.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the minister has, I know, been to Afghanistan, as I have, and he has seen the dedication of the people on the ground, our men and women in uniform, of course, and others over there as well who are working on governance and redevelopment issues.

In his ability and opportunity to travel around the world and meet with other world leaders, I wonder if he could comment on how Canada has been perceived in the world now that we have taken a robust approach on not only this issue but on a wide spectrum of issues.

It is my belief that Canada has been seen in a far more favourable light as far as stepping to the plate when needed. I would like to hear his comments on some of the discussions he has had as he has travelled around the world.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that our efforts in Afghanistan are very well received. The international community understands that we are in Kandahar, one of the most dangerous provinces of the country, and what we are doing.

It also knows about the Manley panel and all its recommendations. It understands that Canada needs to have more coordination with the international community. We have a challenge and we will answer it.

The international community understands that we need some help and that we need a partnership in Afghanistan. I hope the international community will answer and give us more troops, approximately 1,000 soldiers.

So, the work that we have done is really appreciated by the international community because we are a country that told the international community that we are going to be in Kandahar. We are going to do the job and that is what we are doing. And that is what we want to continue to do until 2011, but we need more troops. We need to have a partnership in the south. I am optimistic that in the near future we will find a partner for us in Kandahar.

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in such an important debate.

As my colleague the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs just noted, our government believes Canada should live up to its commitment to the people of Afghanistan. That is why we have revised the motion we introduced in the House on February 8. The revised motion represents an effort to achieve bipartisan consensus on the future of the mission in this chamber. It acknowledges what is required for Canada's mission to succeed.

There can be no doubt that there is some fundamental common ground between the government and the official opposition. The revised motion stakes out a clear and principled position. This is a Canadian position rather than just a Conservative position or a Liberal position. As a Canadian position, it is one that can be supported by a majority of the elected representatives of the Canadian people.

This is visible particularly when it comes to the idea that the mission should continue until 2011. We also see common ground on the notion that operational decisions should be left to the Canadian commanders on the ground in Afghanistan. On this side of the House, we believe this is a reasonable compromise. We believe this addresses the important questions Canadians have about the future of the mission.

The choice is simple: either we strengthen the military mission in Afghanistan or we abandon the commitment we have made to the people of Afghanistan and our international allies.

It is up to parliamentarians to vote on what Canada's future role in Afghanistan should be. Again, as my colleague has noted, this is not an easy decision for parliamentarians to make, but a decision that must be made at this time.

Make no mistake, our engagement in Afghanistan is an example of international cooperation at its finest. I know because I have been in Afghanistan. Canadians can take great pride in what their fellow citizens are accomplishing in Afghanistan.

Our soldiers, diplomats, development workers and advisers are making a difference in the lives of thousands of Afghans in Kandahar and across the country. I have seen this firsthand, particularly when it comes to the rights and freedoms of the Afghan women.

I want to talk in more than just abstract terms today. As I said, I have visited Afghanistan. I can therefore illustrate the argument for why we must respect our commitments with reference to my personal experiences.

Much of my focus when I was in Afghanistan was on women and children. I wanted to hear firsthand some of the successes and if things had actually changed for women and children in Afghanistan.

I must say that I was overwhelmed by the personal stories that so many women shared with me. I was overwhelmed by the emotion and appreciation that they had for Canada and the international community.

There is someone by the name of Sally Armstrong, who I understand is one of the people the Manley panel interviewed when it was coming up with its recommendations. I believe she used to be an editor for *Chatelaine* magazine or some other publication.

She sent out a column across the entire country that talked about the women in Afghanistan. It talked about what was wrong and how they needed the support of the international community. Within days, Sally Armstrong received over 8,000 emails from women in Canada. They were asking for the international community and Canada to step up and help these women somehow, some way, saying we could not continue to allow this to go on.



*Government Orders*

I think that Sally Armstrong and other women like her are incredible. They make incredible contributions and are a voice for the Afghan women. They raise the issues and make Canadian women aware of what we can do and how we can help. I am pleased with her work and look forward to the opportunity to meet with her.

As I said, when I was in Afghanistan, I made it my mission to sit down with as many women as I possibly could so I could hear stories firsthand. One of the women I met with, and I talk about her often, is Rona Terin, who is an advocate for women's issues in Kandahar. When I met her, only three months before that her predecessor had been murdered and she stepped into this position. She is an incredibly brave woman. I have great admiration for her.

She stepped into this position to advocate for women and she talked to me about what it was like under the Taliban before the international community stepped in and how things are definitely improving.

She told me that her 13-year-old little girl was going to school for the first time. She explained that women were locked up so much that when they would give birth, their bones would break because they could not get outside to get sunlight and the vitamin D that women need to keep their bones strong. She told me things were changing, and how much she appreciated Canada and wanted me to take that message back.

• (1040)

I also had the opportunity to meet with a number of female parliamentarians. It is important to note that there are more female parliamentarians in Afghanistan than there are in Canada. That speaks very loudly to some of the success we have seen in Afghanistan, which has to be recognized and acknowledged. They asked to come to Canada. They want to sit down with other female parliamentarians to gain some of our advice, and that will be happen soon. They want to talk to us about what Canada has done for them.

Other women I met were recipients of microfinance. Canadians can be very proud knowing that Canada is the leading donor to microfinance in Afghanistan. Many women travelled seven and eight hours to visit me, and not by car. It was on foot. They wanted to talk to me about what Canada had done for them and how much it meant to them that we stay.

All the women were widowed because of the Taliban. Each of them had seven or eight children. They received loans equivalent to \$100 Canadian dollars a year to open small businesses such as a bakery. The bakeries in Afghanistan are not something we would see on a main street in Canada. They are operated out of their homes. They buy ovens and put them in their mud homes. People pay pennies to go into the homes to use those ovens. They bake bread and sell it at the market. By doing that, they can care for their families and pay off their loans. All the loans have been 100% paid back, which is significant.

Thousands of women are able to feed their children now because of microfinance, because of the help from the international community and because of the security on the ground. If they do not have security, they cannot get these loans. The Taliban will not allow them to work, or have a business or care for their children. The

Taliban does not care if they have seven or eight kids who they cannot feed.

One woman told me how she had four girls and four boys. She had to put the girls in the orphanage. However, because of microfinance and because her business was so successful, she was able to retrieve her four girls from the orphanage. She received another \$100 Canadian loan, expanded her business, hired another woman, and the two of them work together.

These are just some of the success stories. So often in the House the debate is about the negative. Every member in the House has a responsibility to talk about the success just as much as the negative in Afghanistan. It is a responsibility. We should honour those who put their lives on the line. We should honour those who have lost their lives for what they believed in and for the successes in Afghanistan.

Some members in the House completely ignore, for their own political reasons, the success in Afghanistan. It does not look like Canada and it never will. However, the success has been enormous and the women have been very clear with their message. They do not want us to go. Their message is full of thanks. They do not want us to turn our backs on them now or all will be lost.

Canada will not turn its back on the people of Afghanistan. It will not turn its back on the women and children. We will stay. We will live up to our international commitment and our commitment to the people of Afghanistan. We will see success, even more than I have talked about.

I look forward to the opportunity to continue telling Canadians and my colleagues in the House about the success I have seen. I look forward to another opportunity to go back to Afghanistan, whenever that may be, so I can see these women again and even more women who are now in successful positions and are able to care for their children.

• (1045)

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State's comments reminded me of a town hall meeting I held on Afghanistan. A young woman, who was one of the panellists, spoke of similar things.

The Secretary of State shared with us how the women asked Canada not to leave until the job was done. What would happen if Canada did leave? Members of the Bloc and NDP say that Canada should leave right away. If we did leave, what would happen to the women and the freedoms they now experience? What would happen to the little girls who are able to go to school?

**Hon. Helena Guergis:** Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to think about what would happen if security pulled out of Kandahar. The fact is there would be mass murder. The Taliban would return and would put everything back to the way it was. To do that, they would need a pretty heavy hand, and that would be mass murder. The women know this and they do not want that to happen.

*Government Orders*

There were times in Afghanistan when other areas were not as secure as they are now. We did not give up on them. We stayed and saw success. We cannot give up on Kandahar either. It is important. We have to stay and finish the job we started. We have a responsibility to do that.

It will take a long time to do this. It is not something that will happen overnight. When we went in this time, we decided we would not only build the buildings, or do everything for the people, or buy them this or that, or set everything up, walk away and then wonder why they could not continue to manage. They are doing it for themselves.

When I met Rona Tareen, the Afghan national police needed blankets. She mobilized the women in Kandahar and they made the 5,000 blankets. It did not happen overnight, but they did it. They took ownership of it and they were very proud of their accomplishments.

• (1050)

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to expand a little on my colleague's experiences. She mentioned meeting with some of the ladies in parliament and the micro loans. Those are great success stories.

I have been speaking with some ladies in my riding who have recently returned. In particular, I spoke with an ICU nurse who told me about the incredible first-hand experiences she had encountered. People volunteer their time to give freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for the freedoms we take for granted.

One specific young lady, 11-year-old Alaina Podmorow, is the founder of "Little Women 4 Little Women in Afghanistan". We are excited that she will be here next week to share with members of Parliament the success of a group of young girls in grades five to seven who raise funds for educators in Afghanistan.

Could my hon. colleague share a little about some of the students, specifically the girls who are now able to go to school because our men and women have worked with the UN sanction mission to provide some peace and stability in their country?

**Hon. Helena Guergis:** Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to visit a school, Aschiana School, in Afghanistan, a school that Canada supports. I met with so many students, so many young girls, who are all in school for the very first time. They are all around the age of 13. I brought them some soccer balls so they could play. I spent a couple of hours there. They took me through all their different classes. They do not only have culture and arts classes, although I was incredibly moved and impressed by their talent. They are incredible artists. It is very important that we work to foster that as well.

I also had an opportunity to meet with some young boys, who are at that vulnerable stage and could have been picked up by the Taliban. They are being trained in trades to become plumbers and electricians. They are showing everyone in the school. They are teaching them how to do all these things, and this has never happened before.

Afghanistan has been faced with 30 years of violence and tyranny. Anything that was built was torn down. People could not read and the illiteracy rate was astounding. They are learning how to read now. They are learning how to do things and to care for themselves.

Canadians can be very proud in knowing that this success is going on.

I want to applaud the students who my colleague just mentioned. It is fantastic that we see this going in Canada. We are trying to make a connection, students to students, with the young girls in Afghanistan to the young girls in Canada. Going forward, a very positive relationship is being built.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Davenport.

Our constituents expect a great deal from us, their elected representatives, when it comes to the practical implications of the debate we are engaging in today in this House.

Steps have been taken in recent days to meet those expectations, and we have legitimate cause to be pleased, because the decision to send our armed forces into a combat zone is certainly one of the most difficult decisions to make, and it must be made wisely and not for partisan, vote-seeking reasons.

What Canadians expect from their country and their government is an approach that is realistic as to our means and our influence, an approach that not only meets our commitments to our international partners, but is truly effective in the field.

In short, we must take action that is sensible, clear-headed, effective and focused primarily on helping the people of a country in disarray, with the sanction of the United Nations and under the authority of NATO.

The top priority of the Liberal team and its leader, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier, is to ensure that the Afghan people are never abandoned. More than ever, we must provide the Afghan people with tangible evidence of our solidarity. To that end, the mission must be clarified, the mission must end and NATO must provide other military personnel, so that a rotation system can be put in place.

It is high time to change our approach, to make adjustments and clarifications, and that is why we in the official opposition are saying again today that we will act resolutely and in keeping with our values, our means and our interests.

Serious analysis of the situation in the field clearly showed that the nature of the mission in Afghanistan could no longer remain the same. We therefore felt it was important to demand that certain major conditions be met to justify our continued military presence in Kandahar until February 2011.

The first condition was that the Conservative government accept the idea that Canada's involvement in Afghanistan must extend beyond military action. The importance of development and diplomacy, which was missing from the government's initial motion, has now been added, to the satisfaction of our party, which had called for this in its own motion.

*Government Orders*

We also included the requirement that NATO formally guarantee the rotation of troops in Kandahar. Sharing responsibilities with our international partners is essential to the redeployment of our armed forces in order to allow them to maximize their contribution with respect to why Canadians agreed to our presence in Afghanistan in the first place.

I am talking about one of the primary intentions of our mission, which is training the Afghan armed forces and rebuilding the country on a solid and democratic foundation. To accomplish this, our country first has to inform NATO, without delay, that Canada's military presence in Kandahar will end on February 1, 2011, and that the withdrawal of our troops will formally begin effective that date and will be completed no later than July 1, 2011.

It is no longer a question of getting stuck in an endless conflict with no end date, which is what the Conservative Party is advocating. Informing NATO is merely the first step. Effective February 2009, in less than a year, Canada's mission will have to focus on tasks that are concrete and of the highest importance in terms of our real capacity to contribute to improving the situation on the ground.

First, we must ensure that adequate training is provided to the Afghan security forces, because Afghanistan has to take charge of its own security. As far as training is concerned, our country has real expertise and it is high time to put that expertise to use. Furthermore, it is just as important to ensure that reconstruction and development projects in Kandahar are completely safe for those working on them and for the end users.

Our armed forces are up to the task. It is just a matter of Canada making the commitment. Nonetheless, it is also crucial, from the outset, to state clearly and in no uncertain terms that our mission in Kandahar will end for good in February 2011.

Why that date? Because in January 2006, at the London conference on Afghanistan, the Canadian government signed the Afghanistan compact, which established benchmarks and a schedule until the end of 2010, for improving security, governance and the social and economic development of Afghanistan.

The Canadian government signed that agreement and we must respect that signature as part of our international obligations.

• (1055)

That is why the amendments put forward by the official opposition are a logical and consistent continuation of Canadian policy in Afghanistan.

As things stand now, there is no sign at all of the diplomatic and development aspects of the mission. It must be changed, therefore, to put the emphasis on stronger, more determined diplomatic initiatives and on a genuine rebalancing of our efforts in the direction of reconstruction and development.

Another thing that the Liberal Party made a priority was the need for real transparency. We are truly pleased, therefore, to see the Conservative government abandon its previous stance of visceral hostility toward the very idea of accountability to Canadians.

It was high time because Canadians want to know—and have every right to know—what the real state of our mission in Afghanistan is and how that mission is being conducted. The very purpose of the amendments put forward by the Liberal Party was to fill the serious gaps the government had left in this regard.

Even though Canada must play its part within NATO—and is doing so admirably thanks to our soldiers on this mission—it is not a great military power. What it has is a strong tradition of diplomacy and development.

In addition, we have managed to resolve once and for all the thorny issue of the transfers of Afghan detainees in view of the unacceptable circumstances in which this was occurring—circumstances that were undermining Canada's credibility and moral authority. The government has changed its position on this issue as well and we can all be happy about that.

We Liberals believe that principles are important but we are not dogmatic or doctrinaire and know when to be flexible. We are proving this once again today through our open-minded attitude to the changes in the government motion.

Taking a constructive approach, we urged the government to seriously consider the ways in which the Liberal positions were compatible with its own, over and above purely partisan considerations.

As of today, there is reason to hope that the House will finally be able to develop a manifestly Canadian policy toward Afghanistan which will give us an effective role there that is consistent with the expectations of our fellow citizens.

We should continue, therefore, to take a positive, constructive approach so that the people of Afghanistan ultimately get as much out of our presence as possible and the international community is finally able to see the light at the end of the tunnel in an issue that is really of major concern.

Canada can and should play a full role and I am confident we have the ability to succeed.

• (1100)

[*English*]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member is on the foreign affairs committee with me. He is a former vice-chair. I have been working with him on the foreign affairs committee for a long time and I respect his judgment on the foreign affairs committee.

However, I have some questions for him in light of what his associate foreign affairs critic said yesterday in this House in reference to the study the foreign affairs committee is doing on Afghanistan.

As part of the whole study on Afghanistan, it is important to listen to all voices so that the committee can get all the facts and figures and make the right judgment. One of the key elements of that is the bipartisan panel headed by Mr. Manley. That panel was mandated to take a comprehensive and unbiased look at the mission and come back with recommendations, which we now see the government has adopted in this resolution, and now we find enough common ground with the Liberal Party.

*Government Orders*

When we in the committee asked for the Manley panel to come in front of the committee, the Liberals refused. Why they refused, I do not know. It came to me to ask them why they were afraid of the Manley panel, why they would not listen to the Manley panel.

We have put forward a request that the Manley commission come before the committee. I have submitted those names as witnesses. I hope that at committee the Liberal Party will agree to have the members of the Manley commission come before the committee so we can listen to them. They are free to ask any questions.

What I fail to understand is that yesterday the member's associate foreign affairs critic said that the Manley commission members should have talked to us beforehand. Why would they talk to us? We are not the experts on Afghanistan. We are studying the issue on Afghanistan. Why would they come beforehand and listen to the committee? It should have been the other way around. I am extremely amazed that the Liberal position is that the Manley commission should have listened to us before going out. We are not the experts. In fact, we listen to the experts.

Perhaps he could explain what his associate foreign affairs critic said yesterday.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Patry:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague who, like me, sits on the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

• (1105)

[*English*]

I just want to tell the hon. member one thing. Requesting that members of the Manley panel appear before the committee is a decision of the whole committee, and not just a decision of the Liberal Party of Canada.

After reading the panel's suggestions, they are very close to those of the Liberal Party. There would have been no use at that time just to ask them questions. Today we are very close to having an association between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party on this issue because we know we are going. We have principles. They talk about rotation. They about the role of CIDA within Afghanistan. Right now, CIDA is totally absent. In Kandahar, the region where our forces are, CIDA will tell us that it has 355 members over there, but 335 of them are from the armed forces, which leaves 20, and of those 20, there are some members of the RCMP. That is why we are not doing anything in that region.

We could ask the minister or someone from CIDA to answer the question and tell us how many there are, but they tell us nothing. For me, there is no problem. The problem right now is what will we be focusing on with our mission in Afghanistan. This is what we are doing for the moment.

We want to be sure that the government will follow this motion in the sense that we will not stay after 2011. I think Canada is doing its share. Canada is not a military power in the world, but we are working to try to re-establish the development over there. We should do some development in the Kandahar region.

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as we debate Canada's mission in Afghanistan, we should recognize our profound

responsibility to fully and thoroughly consider the sacrifices already made, the nature of our work in that country, and the reality of the situation in that troubled region of the world.

We all recognize the work of the men and women of the Canadian Forces who each day put their lives on the line in the service of our country. They do so with valour and courage and we as a nation owe them a great debt. We are even more so indebted to those who have lost their lives in service to this country and to us as a people.

Around the world there are numerous conflicts that rob the young of their precious lives, cause immeasurable human suffering, and deny to humanity the most cherished of our blessings, peace.

Conflict is not new, nor is it any less senseless than it has ever been. There is an old expression that war is hell. Few who have experienced the reality of war, civilians or soldiers, would, I imagine, disagree.

Debates like the one we are undertaking today on the nature of conflict have been ongoing for as long as the scourge of conflict has characterized the nature of human existence.

One of our country's most prolific and profound writers, Margaret Atwood, once said, "War is what happens when language fails". I agree with Ms. Atwood's statement. When language fails and armed conflict takes its place, it is fair to say that the language then used is force and violence. It is the most horrific and disheartening of all human endeavours.

Instead of the language of conflict, we should always strive to use the language of diplomacy, transparency and security. There is no greater means to avoid conflicts than to work toward these objectives.

Fundamental to the discussions of all conflicts is the question, is it just?

Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have long been credited with deep and transcending philosophical discussions on the nature of a just war. Their work is, generally speaking, characterized by probing questions on war, which we would do well to consider: Does it punish those who have done wrong? Is it undertaken by duly constituted authorities? Is there right intention? Is there a probability of success? No war should be undertaken if it is futile. Is it truly the last resort? Is there distinction between combatants and non-combatants? Is it proportional to the wrong done? Minimal force should be used to achieve success. Although posed hundreds of years ago, these are fundamental questions, among others, that we should consider as we debate the mission in Afghanistan.

Indeed, "The Responsibility to Protect" doctrine as enunciated by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty poses similar questions as those asked by Augustine and Aquinas so long ago.

Fundamental to the concept of a just conflict is the question of probability of success. First and foremost, if we are to ask this question, we must first know what success looks like in Afghanistan.

*Government Orders*

As noted by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday, the success of our mission in Afghanistan requires a change in approach based on three main points: the mission must change toward training, security and reconstruction; the mission must have an end date, not just another date for review; and the mission must be about more than just a military operation. Likewise, we must have a real sharing of the burden which is only attainable through meaningful rotation with other NATO allies.

A fundamental question is this: Is success in Afghanistan measured by the creation of a viable state that functions with stability, justice and compassion? If this is our definition, and it would certainly appear to be a reasonable one, then a great deal of work lies ahead and it is far in excess of simply acting militarily between now and the end of our mission.

Afghanistan is a very troubled nation. Even prior to 2001, that nation was the subject of some 38 different United Nations General Assembly resolutions on varied subjects. During the period of British rule there were no fewer than three Anglo-Afghan wars ending in 1919.

• (1110)

Despite being governed by monarchs until 1973, Afghanistan was continually destabilized by civil war and foreign invasions. From 1973 this instability continued, including the invasion of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union in the 1980s.

The point is that Afghanistan is a nation with a long history of protracted conflicts, instability and both internal and external efforts to establish order and various systems of government.

In today's Afghanistan, we have a deeply entrenched and seemingly unrelenting illegal narcotics trade that defies any and all changes launched against it. This activity generates between \$1 billion and \$3 billion in revenue each year for those who participate in poppy cultivation and the distribution of narcotics in and from Afghanistan. It is clear that much of the military activities that confront us in Afghanistan is likely funded by revenue from these sources. There seems to be no end in sight to this revenue source and we are, therefore, likely to see increased activity and, consequently, greater funds available to those who fight and challenge us in Afghanistan.

We are also witness to cross border support for the militants who operate in that country. Recent political developments in Pakistan are more likely to complicate efforts to confront this challenge than they are to resolve them any time soon.

The length of our nation's military commitment was to conclude in 2007, then 2009 and now, as proposed, in 2011. We certainly need to be clear to both the government of Afghanistan and to our allies that our mission will in fact end definitely in 2011.

It is interesting to note that just last year the New Democratic Party voted against the official opposition and with the Conservative government when we proposed an end date of 2009 for the military mission in Afghanistan.

Once again, we must be clear that if we are to extend the mission to 2011, with a change in our role from 2009 to 2011, that all parties are clear on our new mandate in Afghanistan.

I would remind the House that in December 2001, the United Nations passed resolution 1386 that authorized the creation of the international security assistance force for Afghanistan which was to end its mission in six months. We all know, of course, that this did not happen.

It is also important to note that, despite resolutions passed in the House, our system of government establishes that our forces are directly accountable to the executive branch of the government, not directly to Parliament.

Afghanistan is a nation of almost 32 million people but it has over 90 political parties and these are only the parties approved by the Afghanistan ministry of justice. Others that are not recognized are excluded from this list. With this political reality, is it realistic to imagine a scenario where we can envision a functional and stable state in Afghanistan in the foreseeable future?

We recognize that current assessments of the situation in Afghanistan are made in the context of pledges from nations across the world of \$24 billion in aid to this country. However, the prospect of peace and stability in Afghanistan remains elusive. The political realities of Afghanistan also cloud the nature of the mission there for all nations participating to this point.

As noted previously, a successful military undertaking requires fundamentally a definition of what constitutes success. The reality is quite simply that the mission in Afghanistan has not been clearly defined. Success has not been enunciated in terms that are measurable.

It is for all those reasons that I believe we as a country need to accept the true realities of Afghanistan. We need to understand that, like the seemingly endless list of conflicts from the past, military solutions alone have never succeeded in solving the problems of Afghanistan or even the broader challenges of that region of the world.

Canadians have always been willing to make the sacrifices necessary to promote freedom and justice throughout the world. However, let us not embark on such undertakings that, as noted in the concepts of Saints Augustine and Aquinas, have no reasonable prospect of success.

Afghanistan needs the world's help. We do not dispute that. However, the nature of that assistance needs to form the foundation of our debate.

We owe it to our courageous men and women who serve in places like Afghanistan to ensure that the task at hand is just, that it is achievable and that we are not committing them to a battle far in excess of what can be reasonably expected of us as a country.

• (1115)

We ought to ponder these questions today as we reflect on our mission in Afghanistan, consult our conscience and, hopefully, strive to seek new ways of achieving our goal as human beings, as nations and as fellow inhabitants of this planet.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I must say that the hon. member and the rest of the Liberal Party might be in danger of breaking their arms patting themselves on the back for forcing us to do things that in fact we have been doing pretty much all along. However, we are pleased to find common ground with the Liberals on this issue because it is important to Canadians and, frankly, the rest of the world.

Under the previous Liberal government's leadership of the mission, which was not just a military mission, contrary to what others have said, and this government's leadership of the mission, which is not just a military mission, contrary to what others have said, a lot of other work is going on. I would like my hon. friend's comments on the good work being done by the strategic advisory team Afghanistan and how he sees its contribution to the non-military side of developing governance and diplomacy.

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Mr. Speaker, before I get to the question, it is important for me to emphasize once again that I have some serious concerns about this mission. We should have stuck to our principle of rotation from day one. It was a commitment we made with NATO and we should have made NATO live up to that commitment.

The other thing that is extremely important, which I think has been emphasized not just by myself and other colleagues but by the panel that was put forward by the government, is that the government has done a terrible job explaining to Canadians what the hell we are doing in there and what exactly our mission is in Afghanistan. A better communication strategy is needed.

However, when we look at what type of leadership is needed for this mission, it is not just a question of communication, which I think is extremely important, but it is to have a mission in place that is achieving all our goals. Our goals cannot just be military because military alone will not solve this particular problem in Afghanistan. Afghanistan needs infrastructural assistance and aid.

I know that CIDA and other strategic advisory teams that are in place are doing a great job but more emphasis needs to be put on those particular fields. I would encourage that government member to do whatever he can on his side to ensure that, if the mandate is to extend, it cannot be done under the same provisions that we have at the moment. It needs to change. It needs to be broadened. There needs to be broader emphasis on aid and development for that region and an end to the conflict by 2009.

**Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in his closing remarks, my hon. colleague talked about our responsibility as parliamentarians toward our soldiers.

There is no doubt that when Parliament discusses a military deployment this is a very serious decision that parliamentarians need to discuss and engage in. There is also no doubt that there are various points of view and passionate opinions about this issue.

However, I would like to hear the member's comments on the fact that there are accusations from some members of this House that any kind of debate is aid or comfort to the enemy and that it is not helping the actual objectives of the mission. I found it extremely shocking that while parliamentarians have a responsibility, not only to our soldiers but to Canadians and to the rest of the world, to

debate this matter extensively and exhaustively, some members make accusations that any kind of motivation behind this debate is aiding and comforting our enemy, when I think the purpose is exactly the opposite.

• (1120)

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale for the wonderful work he has been doing, not just on this file but on several other files.

My hon. colleague is absolutely correct. The government has made terrible accusations about the patriotism of members when they question this mission, which is quite appalling.

We, as members of Parliament, are all proud of our men and women in uniform. I think we all understand that we have a role to play in the world, that being one of constructive engagement, of peace builders and of peacemakers.

Our mission in Afghanistan was approved under international law by the UN. In fact, there is a resolution backing our mission and our presence there.

However, we have a burden as well that needs to be understood. When we engage in these particular actions in Afghanistan, it must be constructive and our goal must be for long term peace and development for that country.

**Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to indicate to the Chair that I will be splitting my time today with my colleague from Calgary East.

As I rise to speak to this important motion on Canada's future role in Afghanistan, I must first point out how much I value this opportunity to participate in this particular debate. I believe that my own colleagues, along with many of those across the chamber floor and certainly my constituents in Prince George—Peace River, know full well the significance I place upon this particular issue.

I have been passionate about this mission since the first Canadian troops were deployed to the troubled nation of Afghanistan many years ago now. However, as my knowledge has grown about the mission, about the Canadian soldiers who have served there and about the hope and the assistance it provides to the Afghan people themselves, I am more reassured than ever before that Canada has a moral obligation to participate in this mission. It is not only for the sake of the people of Afghanistan and for those living throughout the Middle East, but for the sake of Canadians and everything we have ever stood for in terms of peace and freedom.

Over the next few minutes I will describe my own personal experiences and observations from my visit to Afghanistan in December 2006. I want to relay the sentiments that were conveyed to me by our Canadian soldiers and their families back here. I want to illustrate that the grieving families of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice are still committed to the mission.

These are not armchair observers in the debate surrounding this mission. They are involved in the most deeply personal way possible. I am heartened that members of the official opposition have also chosen to listen to the advice of these individuals. However, I am puzzled that members of the NDP and the Bloc Québécois steadfastly choose to disregard those who truly matter in this debate.

*Government Orders*

It is perhaps due to their lack of understanding about the needs of the Afghan people, of the true evil nature of the Taliban, of Canada's military history and of the nature of peacekeeping. For their benefit, I would like to clear up many of these myths and misconceptions.

First, this is a United Nations mandated mission. We have heard that time and time again and yet people would like to frame this debate and frame the mission as though it somehow is not. We hear from people who compare this mission to the Russian invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. We heard our Minister of National Defence, when he led off the debate yesterday, refute this very clearly and yet these myths and misconceptions about our mission there still prevail.

Likewise, this is not a peacekeeping mission. We hear from people who suggest that somehow we have allowed this mission to devolve into more of a combat mission and yet people do not describe what that exactly means. They do not reveal that in the last year there has not been one Canadian soldier who has died from actual combat, engaging with the enemy in a shooting war, and yet this myth prevails as well.

However, this is not a peacekeeping mission and it has never been a peacekeeping mission as such. It is important for Canadians remember that peacekeeping missions were where the UN would send blue helmets, to use the common phrase, to intervene between two warring sovereign nations. That was usually the sense of a peacekeeping mission.

Canada has done that type of role many times in the past and with much success but Afghanistan is not a peacekeeping mission because there is no peace to keep yet. I think it is important that we remember that.

The Afghan people and their democratically elected government enthusiastically endorse our presence there. I am reminded of the fact that not too long ago, somewhere around December of last year, Peter Mansbridge revealed a new poll and, in his opening remarks that night on *The National*, he said that Canadians would be shocked by this poll.

I was watching television and I thought "oh my God, is it true? They polled the Afghan people and they don't want Canada there". No. The media was shocked because the poll revealed exactly the opposite. It revealed what we had been saying and what Canadian soldiers knew, which is that the Afghan people want us and need us there. They need us to complete the mission.

I want to speak briefly because time is of the essence and 10 minutes goes so quickly. Most of us could talk for hours on this topic.

• (1125)

I have had many unique experiences in my lifetime. I have had many extremely moving and unique experiences in the 15 years that I have been privileged to represent the people of northeastern British Columbia in this chamber, and in my duties across the nation and around the world.

Many of those experiences have increased my pride in being a Canadian, but I have never ever been more proud to be Canadian

than when I was in Afghanistan at Christmas in 2006, never, and I will explain why.

It was such a great privilege for me to travel to that country during the Christmas holiday. When one thinks of Christmastime, one thinks of wanting to spend it with one's own children, family and friends, but I chose to go there with two of my colleagues and a delegation of other Canadians, entertainers and the Chief of Defence Staff. The two colleagues who had the privilege of going with me at the time were my colleague from Edmonton Centre and the current Minister of the Environment.

As we travelled throughout the war-torn region and visited the forward operating bases, the FOBs as they are known, the troops would come up to us and say, "You guys must have drawn the short straw to have to come over here and see us at Christmastime". They appreciated it, but they were puzzled by it.

My two colleagues and I had to repeatedly reassure them that we were there because we were privileged to be there. We had to lobby for months to go there to show our support and express our appreciation on behalf of our constituents and all Canadians.

The thrill of sharing a coffee at the Tim Hortons in Kandahar base is a small thing, but it was very deeply gratifying as an individual and a Canadian to be in the presence of these fantastic young men and women, and to help serve them Christmas dinner in one of the forward operating bases. They were not griping or complaining, but revealed to us it was their first hot meal in days and we were there to help serve them and express our appreciation.

It was gut wrenching for us to think that some of these terrific young Canadians might not be coming back alive and yet they were so committed. They know why they are there. They see the reasons why they are there every day and remain committed to the mission.

I am privileged and pleased to have three young Canadian adult children. As a parent, I cannot imagine a worse fear than losing a child. But, likewise, if I try to put myself in the position of the Afghan parents, the men and women with children, I cannot imagine anything worse than not being able to offer one's children hope of a better future.

Think about it. I know you are a parent yourself, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine going through life and not being able to offer hope for a better future for your children?

That is what we bring. That is what our young men and women in uniform are bringing. That is what our provincial reconstruction teams are bringing. That is what our diplomats are bringing. That is what the aid workers are bringing to the people of Afghanistan.

We cannot abandon them, as some parties and individuals in the House would like to believe. We cannot abandon them and there can be no support for the Afghan people without security. We have heard that time and time again during this debate. I think the majority of Canadians understand that.

*Government Orders*

I want to quickly talk about one other issue just to drive home the message of why we are there. My wife and I were involved in assisting the Afghan ambassador to Canada and his wife, Omar and Khorshied Samad, in planning a shawl sale to try to support some of the families, women and children in Afghanistan. I remember being out for dinner one evening in Ottawa with the Samads when the ambassador received a telephone call and I could see he was upset. I asked him, because I am a nosy person, what the particular issue was.

• (1130)

He relayed to me that he had received a message that there had just been another tragedy in his country. It was only two this time. Two young girls, young children, were walking home from school. A motorcycle went by ridden by two Afghans with a machine gun. The two young girls were murdered on the roadside while walking home from school. What was their crime? Their crime was that they wanted an education. They wanted hope for the future. Imagine that, two young children, two young girls, walking home.

To me, the discussion that night very clearly exemplified why we are there. I have told this story across our land in the days, weeks and months since. Whenever I tell the story, it very clearly tells Canadians why we are there and why we must remain there.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to see these debates held more often in this House. In fact, they are not so much debates, as they are explanations of the various positions taken on all sides of the House, particularly the position that we in Bloc Québécois have taken and will take regarding Canada's mission in Afghanistan. The Bloc's position is very clear: we believe we should withdraw our troops in 2009.

That said, I respectfully listened to what my colleague across the floor had to say. I had a chance to read up on the matter. Indeed, in a debate like this one, I think it is extremely important to carefully read papers and books on Afghanistan before taking a stance.

I urge my hon. colleague across the floor, as well as all members of this House, to read a certain book that has been published, one that is neutral, since I did not write it. It was written by Michael Barry. I read the French version, *Le royaume de l'insolence: l'Afghanistan, 1504-2001*, but the original English version, from Cambridge University Press, is titled *A History of Modern Afghanistan*. This extremely interesting book charts the history of Afghanistan from 1504 to 2001. They are said to be an unconquered people made up of various tribes that have been fighting for the past 400 years.

What makes us think that, between now and 2011, our tiny contribution will stop the fighting there?

• (1135)

[*English*]

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Bloc for his question and reference to the lessons of history, but I would go beyond that and note the old saying: "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it".

The member points out that Afghanistan has a long and tragic history. We are well aware of that and all Canadians are, and we do

not have to read an encyclopedia to do it, but what is he really saying? Is he saying that these little children that I personally met and my colleagues have talked about are destined for a future with no hope? Is that what he is saying because that is what I think he is saying. He is saying it is not worth the sacrifice of our young men and women. It is not worth the dollars and cents we are investing over there. It is not worth the effort. It is not worth the commitment.

I have always had a problem with the Bloc's position which is that we can somehow set an arbitrary date and say we are going to pull out in 2009 or 2011. I understand we have come to an agreement with the Liberal Party, so that hopefully we can get majority support in this chamber to extend the mission to 2011. But how is it that we can just decide as the NDP has decided that this is enough, that we are going to leave these people, and we are going to allow the Taliban to retrench because that is surely what will happen. We heard many people speak about this in this debate as well.

Try to forecast into the future as to what would happen if the Taliban returned. What would happen to those girls who are going to school? What would happen to the teachers who dare to teach girls? We know what would happen. They would be murdered by this regime because it is not within its beliefs.

I say we have to study the lessons of history, but we also have to study how continuously the world has failed Afghanistan. That is the lesson from history that we should be taking into account. We would want to ensure, on behalf of the sacrifice we have already made there, that the sacrifice is not in vain and ensure we never abandon the people of Afghanistan again because it is not only in their best interests but to repeal a base and to ensure there is no longer a base for worldwide terrorism in Afghanistan—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today is a very important historical day. The Afghan ambassador told me yesterday at a function that today is a very important historical day for Canada and the international community, because today we are discussing Afghanistan. Today we are discussing international efforts to bring peace and stability in the world. Today we are talking about providing security.

It is an international effort mandated by the United Nations under NATO command, but the whole community is coming together. Not only is NATO providing security, but it is also important that all the regional countries are in Afghanistan to rebuild it: India, Pakistan, China, all of them.



*Government Orders*

I have attended the rebuilding conferences on Afghanistan in New Delhi to see how all the regional countries have joined together to provide development assistance. Although NATO and Canada are providing the security aspect, we must not forget that the development effort in Afghanistan is not only done by us, but also by all of the regional countries that surround Afghanistan. They know the importance of stability in Afghanistan because it provides security for them as well.

Today I would like to give the House an update on our mission in Afghanistan. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all members why Canada is in Afghanistan and why it is so important that we continue the work we are doing.

What has been achieved in Afghanistan since the overthrow of the Taliban is remarkable. Through Afghanistan's determination, Canadian efforts and the support of the international community, Afghans are showing leadership and taking control of their own lives and their country as a whole. Let me list a few achievements in this regard for the benefit of the House.

Close to six million children, one-third of them girls, are enrolled in schools in 2007-08. That compares with the 2001 figure of 700,000 consisting of boys only. Canada is supporting work to establish 4,000 community based schools and train 9,000 teachers, 4,000 of them female. About 120,000 children, 85% of them girls, will benefit.

Afghans' per capita income doubled between 2004 and 2007. Canada is the top donor to Afghanistan's microfinance program. This program is benefiting more than 418,000 savings and small loans service clients in 23 provinces, including Kandahar. More than two-thirds of the program's clients are women.

Some 83% of Afghans now have access to basic medicare. That compares with 9,000 in 2004. The infant mortality rate is down by 22% since 2001. To look at it another way, this means 40,000 more babies survive every year. The under five child mortality rate is down 26%.

Behind these numbers is the undeniable truth that the living conditions of the people of Afghanistan are improving, that this country, which suffered so terribly under the brutal Taliban rule and through years of civil war, is being rebuilt. We are proud that Canada is assisting in this. We are especially proud of the tremendous work being accomplished by the brave Canadian men and women, both military and civilian, who are serving in Afghanistan. Through these collective efforts, the Afghanistan government is developing institutional capacity that will have enduring results. However, rebuilding a country like Afghanistan after decades of war takes time and commitment.

For these reasons, the Canadian government has taken seriously the recommendations made by the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan. This group of eminent Canadians was given the difficult task of providing Canadians with the high level of debate, insight and analysis that goes beyond partisan politics. The result of their efforts is a balanced, thoughtful and comprehensive report to Canadians.

The government has accepted the panel's specific recommendation of extending Canada's mission in Afghanistan under the conditions

that the right steps are taken to ensure that our young men and women who are in harm's way are given the best chance of success.

• (1140)

Alongside the United Nations and our international partners, Canada has been effectively engaged in efforts to strengthen Afghan governance at the national and subnational levels. Canadian efforts focus on helping the Afghan government strengthen the efficiency, transparency and accountability of its institutions.

Let me comment on the revised motion on Afghanistan that our government has presented to the House. The revised motion represents an effort to achieve a bipartisan consensus on the future of Afghanistan. It acknowledges what is required of Canada's mission to succeed.

It is evident that the commitment to Afghanistan made by successive Canadian governments has not yet been completed. The ultimate objective is to enable the Afghans to govern their own country. By signalling our intent to withdraw now, we would run the risk of losing everything that we have worked for. There is no doubt that the cost of failure and abandonment would be hard.

We can all take heart from the fact that there is some fundamental common ground between the government and the official opposition on Afghanistan. This is visible particularly when it comes to the idea for the mission to continue until 2011. We also see common ground on the notion that operational decisions should be left to Canadian commanders on the ground in Afghanistan. On this side of the House we believe this is a reasonable compromise. We believe this addresses the important questions Canadians have about the future of the mission.

The revised motion states a clear and principled position. This is a Canadian position, rather than just a Conservative position or a Liberal position. As a Canadian position, it is one that can be supported by the majority of the elected representatives of the Canadian people. This is the duty we owe to our troops. Every day they put their lives on the line for us. It was politicians of both parties who asked them to do that. It is now up to the politicians to do their part for the people of Afghanistan and to work together to reach a consensus on the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

Yesterday I was at a function on the promotion of democracy, something which the foreign affairs committee had presented last year to the House. It talked about how Canada would be involved in the promotion of democracy. This conference was being held at Queen's University.

Sitting next to me was a young German lady from a German institution that does development work in Afghanistan. We talked about the development of Afghanistan. She said she represented an institution with the same left-wing ideology as the NDP. I asked her what she thought about the position of that party. She said she was there to tell them that without security, there will be no development in Afghanistan.

*Government Orders*

That institution has the same ideology as the NDP, the party with its head in the sand and the attitude of hear no reason, see no reality. That party is the only party around the world with the ideology that says to leave Afghanistan without development. Yet the NDP's own brothers and sisters around the world, including the lady from Germany, are saying that there can be no development without security.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague. With regard to the debate on Afghanistan being held by this House, it must be understood that no one is questioning the presence of Canada, of our troops, our soldiers in Afghanistan. That is a given.

My colleague who just spoke is absolutely right: the NDP is a problem. I can assure you that we do not agree with the NDP's insistence on withdrawal. In my opinion, this is a very important point: we cannot withdraw from Afghanistan tomorrow afternoon at 3:30 p.m., saying we are leaving. That is impossible. We have laid out the Bloc Québécois position. It is clear. The Bloc wants to withdraw in 2009. Having said that, the House will make a decision and we will have to live with this decision and respect it.

I have a question and I will be repeating myself. Our colleague who spoke earlier, the Chief Government Whip, told us that we were perhaps not well informed. I am not talking about reading history. I invite my Quebec colleagues and other colleagues in this House to read *A History of Modern Afghanistan* by Michael Barry. I did not write this book. Therefore, it is not partisan.

This book raises an issue that leads me to ask my colleague opposite a question. The troops may remain in Afghanistan in 2009, 2010, 2011 and perhaps beyond. Can he assure us that the work—and I really like what our Conservative colleagues are saying—

• (1150)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[*English*]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear that the Bloc does not want us to leave tomorrow as the other parties were being saying. If we leave in 2009, the work will not be done.

The member referred to a book. My ancestors came from that region and I know what is going on there. My colleagues and I understand the cultural complexity of that region.

Never before has there been such a brutal regime as the Taliban, even in Afghanistan's history. For the first time the international community has joined together. The international community under the United Nations has joined together under the Afghanistan Compact to rebuild that country, and that will be the success the member is asking for. If we stay until 2011, our work will be a success. The London compact, the Afghanistan Compact by the international community, is working.

**Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the motion talks about a regular way of informing Canadians about progress in Afghanistan. I listen to radio shows and there is a lot of confusion about what is going on over there. People are saying the

aid money is going there but it is not actually getting to the people. There is all kinds of confusion about what is actually going on over there that is making life better for Afghans.

What kind of regular reporting plan does the government have to present to Parliament and to Canadians so that we are better informed about the issues my colleague is concerned about?

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, the motion clearly specifies how we would inform Canadians. We have been informing Canadians all the time. The NDP members have their heads in the sand. I said that the NDP has an attitude of hear no reason, and now I say it is one of hear no information. The NDP has already made a decision for Canada to leave. What is the point in telling those members anything because they have already made a decision not to support this resolution. I fail to understand the member's question at all.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you immediately that I will be sharing my speaking time with the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

I am pleased to participate in this debate on the government motion on extending the mission in Afghanistan. Unlike other debates we have had in recent weeks, I have the real impression that I can express my opinion in this debate and be the voice of Quebecers.

I would point out that before the parliamentary recess, we were considering bills that were really matters of details. I am thinking, for example, of the bill relating to consultation for appointing senators. At that point, I really had the impression that I was speaking on relatively pointless subjects, while this time, on Afghanistan, I believe it is extremely important for the Bloc Québécois, for the Quebec nation and for the Canadian nation to debate this issue in depth. The Bloc Québécois has in fact been calling for an in-depth debate on this issue for a long time.

Behind the Afghanistan issue there lies a world view, a view of international relations and of the way to build peace. The question is, how we are going to be able to assist countries with economic, social and political problems to get onto the road to prosperity, democracy and the common good. At bottom, what we are debating today is Canada's current vision of all of those topics.

I admit that I am a little disappointed with the approach the Liberals have taken to this. In the case of the Conservatives, we have known the essence of their thinking for a long time now. In fact, the Speech from the Throne talked about extending the mission to 2011. The repeated announcements by the Prime Minister concerning rising military expenditures, with yet another one last week, clearly demonstrate that this government takes a militaristic view of international relations that is closely modelled on another regime's. I am not talking about the regime in Afghanistan, although I could talk about that too; rather, I am talking about the American administration, which has itself been disowned by a large proportion of its population, and also by a large proportion of America's Republicans. We can see this clearly at present in the debate about Iraq and the debate that is taking place around the Democratic and Republican primaries.

*Government Orders*

I am not surprised by the position taken by the Conservative government, but the position taken by the Liberals does surprise me. In a way, their opportunistic approach—I have to call it that—is based on one important issue: Afghanistan. Our vision of Canada's place in the world—and obviously, for us, of a sovereign Quebec's place in the world—and the approach that Quebec will take, but that Canada should also take, must reflect all of the issues I have just referred to: development, security, progress toward democracy and prosperity for peoples who are in great need of them.

I would have expected the Liberals to stay within the parameters that should govern this debate, that is, those issues. To avoid an election, by raising totally spurious arguments, they are trying to avoid this debate. The speeches given yesterday are good examples, in particular the speech by the Leader of the Opposition, but also the speeches by some members of the government and the Liberal Party.

For example, the motion itself is riddled with vague words and assumptions. In fact, it is playing fast and loose with the truth, as did the first motion introduced by the Conservative government. They have made it even worse in the second motion, introduced at the end of last week, which we are now debating.

Here is an example:

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

First of all, that statement placed too much emphasis on diplomacy and development assistance because we know that up until now, the nature of the mission has been military.

Worse still, it fails to mention one thing. It suggests that at the time, there was unanimity or near-unanimity in the House and that today, the extension approved in May 2006 should be turned into a new extension from February 2009 to February 2011.

● (1155)

The wording is misleading. It fails to mention that on May 17, 2006, when the House voted on a government motion to extend the mission to February 2009, the motion was adopted by a margin of only four votes. At the time, there were 149 votes in favour and 145 votes against, a difference of four votes.

The vast majority of Quebeckers are in favour of ending the military mission in February 2009. Poll after poll has shown that, and the numbers are going up. When I travel around Quebec, I like to tell Quebeckers that if they had put just five more Bloc Québécois members in the House, or even just three more, the extension would not have been passed. Quebeckers get the message, as we will see in the next election, which we hope will happen very soon.

It is not true that on May 17, 2006, the House voted by a convincing majority to extend the mission. The motion was passed by a margin of just five votes.

That was true in 2006, and it is even truer now in early 2008. We have not been given any more good reasons to support it. On the contrary, we have more reasons than we did in May 2006 to be against extending the mission.

We were told that the vote will be in March. I find it very hard to understand those Liberals who said in 2006 they were opposed to extending the mission until February 2009 but are going to rise now and vote in favour of extending it until 2011. The Prime Minister said the troop withdrawals would begin in June or July but would finish in December 2011. If we were so divided in the House on this issue in 2006, it is very hard to understand how there could be such unanimity now among the Liberals, unless it is just political opportunism.

At least the Conservatives demonstrate a certain consistency in their positions, even though I do not agree with them. When it comes to the Liberals, there is total confusion. This shows Quebeckers that there is really only one choice in Quebec for people who are in favour of a humanistic approach, a cooperative approach that puts the emphasis on diplomacy and development. They want to put the military aspects aside, ensuring security of course but not having a fundamentally military mission. There is only one voice representing these people in the House because the Conservatives and the Liberals are in bed together in this regard. This single voice is the voice of the Bloc Québécois. A good portion of Quebeckers and of the Quebec nation understands this already.

I want to add one final comment. On February 19, 2007, the Liberals tabled a motion asking the government to end the mission in February 2009, which was the date to which we had committed ourselves with the international community. The Bloc Québécois has always wanted Canada to keep its commitments to the international community. When Quebec is a sovereign country and makes commitments to the international community, we will want it to see its commitments through to the end. We are applying the same principle here to a decision that was made democratically, although only by five votes, as I said before.

The Bloc Québécois has always wanted to abide by this decision. At the time, it was the NDP that saved the Conservative mission in Afghanistan. They are the ones who put us in the situation we face today. Back then, the Liberals had their own, consistent view on Afghanistan and had proposed that the House pass definitive legislation requiring a military withdrawal from the Kandahar area in February 2009. The NDP were the ones who helped the Conservatives extend the mission, not just to 2009 but to 2011. That is why their amendment is as irresponsible as their position has been since the beginning. They, too, are being political opportunists. That should be deplored and condemned. If we look a little more closely at the NDP's position, it is not really immediate withdrawal they want, even though they constantly say so. If we push them hard enough, we discover it is immediate withdrawal in complete safety.

What does complete safety mean? It means that one or more NATO partners will have to take our place in the province of Kandahar. That is why we want to have a vote on this motion very soon. We want it defeated and our NATO allies informed that they will have to replace the Canadian troops in February 2009.

*Government Orders*

• (1200)

**Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the remarks made by my Bloc Québécois colleague. He talked about misleading wording, and the Bloc members would know, given all the stories they can tell. On the radio we heard that a Bloc Québécois candidate claimed that there were as many deaths during the period we have been in Afghanistan as during the second world war. That just goes to show how misleading wording really depends on the point of view.

I would like to know how much of the Manley report my Bloc Québécois colleague has read. Because this report was really done properly. I would also like to ask my Bloc Québécois colleague a question, even though I highly doubt he will be able to respond.

In the past, Canada went to help the Rwandan people. Now, a report shows that 800,000 Rwandans died waiting for help from the UN. Does my colleague think that Rwandans deserved better assistance? How is that different from what we are currently doing in Afghanistan to protect the people there?

• (1205)

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Mr. Speaker, there are so many fabrications in the question that was asked that I am going to focus on the Manley report. Obviously, I know my Conservative Party colleague and he is somewhat like the motion. As I said, it is incomplete and riddled with vague words and assumptions.

I would like to tell him about the Manley report. When Mr. Manley was appointed, it was very clear to us that this process was also politically motivated, that is, appointing a former minister, particularly the previous government's Minister of Foreign Affairs, to lead such a commission. Yet, upon reading the Manley report, it is interesting to note that 75% to 80% of the report is a clear criticism of the Conservative militaristic approach in the Afghanistan file, and that, contrary to all expectations—in my opinion, in response to a political directive—manages to come up with a series of flimsy conditions that allow the Prime Minister and the government the possibility of extending the mission from February 2009 to 2011, thereby laying a trap for the Liberals, which they fell into.

If I may, I would like to read part of the Manley report, from page 32:

It is essential to adjust funding and staffing imbalances between the heavy Canadian military commitment in Afghanistan and the comparatively lighter civilian commitment to reconstruction, development and governance.

This is what the Bloc Québécois has been calling for from the beginning and what we continue to ask for: a rebalancing of the mission, with a shift from a military focus to development.

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, development and diplomacy are required to win the hearts and minds of Afghans. Even a former colleague of the member for Joliette, Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, clearly indicated that security is needed for children to be able to go to school and in order to build drinking water treatment systems. We know that the 3 Ds are required in Afghanistan. We also know that the Bloc Québécois has adopted a 3 I approach: inconsistency, irresponsibility and improvisation.

I would like our colleague from Joliette to explain the comments of some of his colleagues who, with their fancy footwork and

backtracking, are being political opportunists. Why is the Bloc Québécois dabbling in political opportunism? In June 2004, their leader stated, "Let us be perfectly clear...we must work tirelessly to track down and bring to justice those responsible for these barbaric acts." Why does this no longer apply in 2008?

In 2006, the member for Saint-Jean stated, "All this suggests to us that they are on the path to success and more needs to be done to get there. We probably have to stay in that country for quite some time."

I could give you many more quotes along those lines. Even in this House, in 2007, a member said that a sovereign Quebec would participate in international intervention in Afghanistan. Where is the Bloc going with the mission in Afghanistan, if—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The hon. member for Joliette has 30 seconds left.

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised by the member's ignorance of the Bloc's positions. We are the ones who have had a consistent position from the beginning. We support participation in the Afghanistan mission, but not the participation being imposed by the Conservatives, blindly accepted by the Liberals, and warned against by the NDP with its irresponsible position.

We wish to honour our commitment until February 2009. After that, our role in Afghanistan will change. We never considered leaving Afghanistan. Those are lies and false information. That is exactly what I was saying to you, Mr. Speaker: this government puts a spin on information in favour of a wrong-headed military approach.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on this motion regarding the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, particularly because several members of the Bagotville 3rd Squadron in my riding, Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, are actively involved in the efforts as part of this mission.

The Bloc Québécois cannot support a motion of this kind. This marks no change in the Bloc's position. We said clearly that we were prepared to go to the polls on this issue if that is what the Conservative government wants. Our position is clear. The Government of Canada must not extend the term of this mission, which will end in February 2009. Canada has done its part and it is the turn of other NATO member countries to take over. Quebeckers want Canada to end this mission in February 2009, as scheduled.

The Conservatives' and Liberals' desire to extend the mission to 2011 shows that they are out of touch with the values of Quebec. The people of Canada and Quebec are very divided on the question of the military presence in Afghanistan. The Quebec nation has its own unique values and interests. Every time the Bloc Québécois has to take a position, we try to imagine what the government of a sovereign Quebec would do. That is why the debate today is very important.

*Government Orders*

The mission in Afghanistan has to be rebalanced. That is why the Bloc Québécois has long called for NATO member countries to be informed that the troops will be withdrawn in February 2009. Between now and then, the fundamental objective of the international coalition and NATO must be to rebuild the economy and democracy and make Afghanistan a viable state. To that end, Canada must play a leadership role in distributing humanitarian aid and in the reconstruction of the country. It is therefore important to say clearly, not only to the NATO coalition members but also to the people of Quebec and Canada, that the Canadian army in Afghanistan will begin rebalancing its role on the ground.

The Bloc Québécois supported sending troops to Afghanistan as part of the NATO effort. The operation that involved Canada was similar to a peacekeeping mission, with the goal of stabilizing Kabul and the surrounding region. Why are the people of Canada and Quebec still so divided today on the presence of the Canadian armed forces in Afghanistan? The Bloc Québécois believes that Canada must deliver its development aid as soon as possible, through multilateral organizations, and in particular through the United Nations agencies, which would eliminate many overlaps and prevent working at cross purposes.

Quebeckers and Canadians need assurances that the government intends to act in the interests of the Afghan people, work toward sustainable development and ensure that local people's basic human rights are respected and protected.

The successful reconstruction of Afghanistan will take more than just the use of weapons or military might. To date, Canada has made a substantial effort in hot spots in Afghanistan. Now, we need to invest more in diplomacy.

The Bloc suggests that Canada organize an international conference on Afghanistan, as an opportunity to discuss the reconstruction and the development assistance the international community is providing for Afghanistan.

The Bloc Québécois has been talking for a number of months about bringing a new balance to the mission. If we continue what we are doing, many more lives could be lost.

• (1210)

Sadly, too many lives have been lost during this mission.

Not long ago, I witnessed one family's human drama: the death of a soldier on this mission. I attended the funeral of Corporal Renaud, a man from Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, in my region. He was 26 years old, and his spouse was pregnant when he was killed. That child will never know his or her father. I saw how much his parents and grandparents suffered as a result of this soldier's death. Canada must end this mission in February 2009 to prevent more communities and families from going through this.

Our combat approach to this mission is costing too many lives. Shifting the mission's focus in three areas is urgent. I would like to repeat the main points I raised in this House last April, during the debate on Canada's role in Afghanistan.

First, we must increase reconstruction assistance and do a better job of coordinating it.

Second, the nature of our military activities must change.

Third, we must drastically change how we look at the opium problem.

Social development in Afghanistan is appalling. In 2004, this country was ranked 173rd out of 178 countries listed on the human development index.

Canadians and Quebeckers have the right to know the ramifications of the active participation of our armed forces, and to demand that Canadian operations place a greater emphasis on social development and peacekeeping as soon as possible.

The Conservative motion sets the deadline for the Canadian mission in Kandahar at 2011. Canada has been in Kandahar since 2006. We feel that by February 2009, the current mission deadline, Canada will have done its share.

What matters most is that the soldiers' mandate in Afghanistan be redefined before their withdrawal in 2009. Quebeckers and Canadians have sent troops to Afghanistan and have done their part.

The Taliban regime fell a long time ago. However, achieving peace and rebuilding a viable Afghan state is far more difficult. But that is what the fundamental objective of the international coalition and the United Nations should be: reconstructing the economy, paving the way for a democratically viable state in Afghanistan so that Afghans can take control of their own country and their own development.

That is why the government must set precise deadlines to rebalance this mission by February 2009, and ensure that the soldiers have the necessary resources to accomplish the reconstruction and security work in the field.

In closing, even though we want Canada to withdraw from Kandahar at the end of this mission, we do not consider the NATO mission as a whole to be ending in failure. That is why we have always wanted an alternative within NATO, to have another country replace the Canadian contingent in Kandahar. The federal government must immediately inform NATO member countries that our mission is ending in February 2009.

• (1215)

[English]

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the Bloc member, who said that Canada has done its fair share in Afghanistan. We have done more than our share, but the job is not complete.

The Bloc is attempting to make this a political issue. It is not a political issue. It is humanitarian issue. He talked about wanting to see human rights protected, but he wants to pull out by 2009. I have a question for the member. What will happen to those women who are starting new businesses and to those little girls who are going to school? We heard from the member for Prince George—Peace River that two little girls were killed just recently. What was their crime? Going to school.

*Government Orders*

If the Bloc plan is to pull out in 2009 and abandon these people, what does he imagine will happen to these women? What does he imagine will happen to these little girls? When President Karzai came to Parliament, he shared what has happened, which was that the Taliban cut off the heads of grandmothers and killed the women and little girls.

As for talking about human rights, what does the member imagine will happen to these people in Afghanistan if we pull out and abandon them? What does he think is going to happen to them? Talk about human rights.

This is not a political issue. It is a humanitarian issue. Canada is doing the right thing. Why is the Bloc abandoning these people?

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

I will say again, Canada has done its share. We have been in this combat mission since 2006. Kandahar is the hottest spot. It is where the real fighting is going on. We must inform the international community and NATO countries that our mission is ending in February 2009, in order to have another country replace us. This combat mission is more or less complete. It must end in February 2009, and shift to a more humanitarian presence that focuses more on the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

**Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if I asked the members in this House who was in favour of the war, I do not think anyone would raise their hand. I do not think anyone is in favour of the war. Earlier, our Bloc Québécois colleague spoke about misleading wording. Our colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord is the king of that, because this is not a combat mission.

My question for him is simple, but, once again, I do not think he will be able to respond. I let him choose between two questions. How many Canadians died in combat missions in Afghanistan last year? I am not talking about car accidents and hidden bombs. Second, did the 800,000 Rwandans who died deserve more assistance? Yes or no, it is a simple question.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

There are a few parts to this question, but I will talk about his first statement. Yes, we are on a combat and war mission when we are in Kandahar. General Hillier is the one who said that as long as we are in Kandahar, the Canadian army will be on a combat mission. So as long as we are in Kandahar, the Canadian army is on a combat mission.

[*English*]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to point out one of the comments my hon. colleague made. He said that Afghanistan rated 173 out of 178 on the human development indicators as of 2004. Has he completely disregarded all of the progress made in the past four years, all of which has been well published?

The Bloc continually ignores that progress, as do members of the NDP. The sky is falling as far as they are concerned. Has the member

completely ignored all of the progress that has happened in the past four years?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, with whom I have the pleasure of sitting on the Standing Committee on National Defence.

We receive information about the mission in Afghanistan periodically. We are hearing two different things. On the one hand, we hear army representatives saying that they are building schools, hospitals and roads, and that there is progress. On the other hand, we hear humanitarian organizations saying that there is no progress and that the Afghan people are truly suffering.

• (1225)

[*English*]

**Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Lethbridge.

I will begin by recognizing that Canada's involvement in Afghanistan has been a bipartisan effort across prime ministers and parliaments. In our commitment to the Afghan people we have tried to join with them to make a difference for a country that has had little hope for several generations due to war and oppression.

In the motion before the House we are looking to the future, not to the past. We are asking Parliament to look forward with us and support the Afghan people once again. There is a job in Afghanistan that still needs to be done and I am confident we can meet the challenge.

I congratulate the Prime Minister for his unwavering support of our men and women in uniform and for doubling the developmental aid to Afghanistan. Canada has shown leadership in committing troops, resources, development and political efforts to help the Afghan government secure a better future for its people.

Canada, as a G-8 nation, is strengthening its position on the world stage. Being a major country entails great global responsibility. We cannot afford an isolationist attitude. Our attitude toward Afghanistan should not be that it is a problem in a land far away, especially in the globalized age. We will be endangering our own national security with such shortsightedness.

In our debate we must consider what the people of Afghanistan want. They want exactly what everybody else here wants, Mr. Speaker, you, me and all Canadians. They want a peaceful and democratic society based on the rule of law. They want to rise above the abject poverty which has been their lot for too many generations. They want jobs and education, peace and stability, and they want hope for the future.

I would suggest two things necessary to achieve these goals are security and development, and they go hand in hand. Without the security provided by the international forces, development would be next to impossible. The stated objective of the mission is to provide a safe and stable environment so that this improvement, important development work, can take place.

*Government Orders*

We are in Afghanistan to establish a secure space, areas where civilian agencies and development workers can function free from harm. As General MacKenzie pointed out in a recent foreign affairs committee meeting:

The ISAF mission is to expand the secure areas until they overlap and to maintain the security for the local population until they trust you. They, the local population, will defeat the insurgency, not us. They defeat it by not supporting it and by trusting that we aren't going to turn tail and leave ahead of schedule.

The goal of insurgents is not to take over territory and defeat NATO forces. Their goal is to outlast the international forces and to make sure we leave sooner rather than later. Insurgency wins by not losing. Their goal is to outlast us. Our goal is to provide the Afghan people with their own resources so that they can outlast the Taliban.

I think it is important to point out that our Canadian Forces are carrying out their mandated duties in an exemplary fashion. We are humbled by the dedication to the mission and by the extreme sacrifices that they are making.

Our military is among the best trained, most professional in the world. They have developed new capabilities in dealing with insurgency. They have developed relationships with the local people establishing lines of communication and building their trust. Their experience is invaluable to the mission.

Security must be established and maintained before we can proceed with aid, reconstruction and development. As I said, security and development go hand in hand. The Afghan people need the international community to help them rebuild their lives and their country after decades of war, oppression and insurgency.

●(1230)

Our long term goal is to help build a stable, democratic and self-sufficient society. We are helping the Afghans to help themselves and we are seeing encouraging results.

We have provided food aid to nine million people and to over 400,000 in Kandahar. We have opened 1,200 wells for clean drinking water. We have provided jobs, education and opportunities for employment. We are helping to establish democratic governance and the rule of law. We are supporting human rights and gender equality. There are many success stories and I have seen them firsthand.

One area where Canada is making a significant contribution is in the efforts to clear the country of mines and unexploded ordnances. Canada is the biggest donor for demining operations. Afghanistan has more landmines and more UXOs than any place else in the world. Thousands of Afghans have been killed and thousands more have been injured.

When I was in Afghanistan last year, I saw firsthand the devastation caused by landmines. While little children play outside, if they see a metal object lying there they will pick it up, and not to play with it but to take it to a pawn shop to sell it as metal to feed themselves because of abject poverty. Sometimes the UXOs blow up in their hands and we see not only one but a number of children that die or are a disabled. This is an important effort that Canada is making. We ought to be proud of it and continue with it. When I was in Afghanistan last year, I saw firsthand the devastation caused and it moved me tremendously.

Demining also opens up more land for agriculture, more housing and clears areas where people can live and children can play safe from harm. Our efforts are showing results, with over half a million mines being destroyed by the end of 2007. There has been a 55% decrease in victims compared to five years ago. All this reconstruction and development can take place because of the security being provided by the NATO mission.

This discussion today, now taking place here in Canada and in other NATO countries is a necessary part of a democratic process. At some point we have to articulate a position. The confusion over the mission, the why, the how and how long, is playing into the hands of insurgents. They interpret this as a lack of solidarity and a wavering of commitment, and this builds their confidence. This must not be allowed to continue.

That is why we have come out and clearly stated that Canada will stay and fulfill its responsibilities. We cannot abandon Afghanistan and its citizens. Our commitment is important because, as John Manley wrote, “—it concerns global and Canadian security, Canada’s international reputation, and the well-being of some of the world’s most impoverished and vulnerable people”.

Mr. Manley recommended in this report that our role should focus on development and shift increasingly toward the training of the Afghan national army, so that as its capability increases our combat role can be significantly reduced.

The motion put forward by this government makes Canada's position clear to our NATO allies, our partners in Afghanistan, and to our troops on the ground. We have committed to 2011 and I am confident that much will be done in the next three years that will bring even better results for the people of Afghanistan.

I would ask all parliamentarians from all parties to support this motion. Put personal feelings and politics aside as this represents a unique opportunity for all Canadians to rally around our troops, our allies, our purpose and the Afghan people. This is an opportunity that we cannot afford to miss. We need to stand together, we need to support our troops, we need to support our mission, and we need to support this motion.

●(1235)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague, but I see a problem here. Indeed, most if not all members of this House agree that the mission should continue in Afghanistan, except the NDP members, who believe that our troops should withdraw immediately. All other members think the mission should continue, with the slight difference that the Bloc Québécois feels that, beginning in February 2009, the mission should shift to one of aid and reconstruction.

*Government Orders*

Michael Barry wrote a very interesting book called *A History of Modern Afghanistan*. Afghanistan has been in conflict for the past 500 years. It is a region, a country, made up of tribes that have been fighting each other for hundreds of years.

How can the member assure this House that in 2011, the job will be done, to borrow a much loved Conservative expression, that the mission will be complete, that the work will be done? How can he give us such an assurance?

[English]

**Mr. Wajid Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I am really disappointed. I do not really know whether the member was even listening to me. I said let us look forward, not to 1504. I said that I have physically and personally seen with my own eyes the development.

I also want to ask all the members of this House when they ever expected a United States company, a Canadian company and Indians would build a copper mine to the tune of \$1.8 billion? That is called progress.

What I would like to suggest is that we learn more about the cross-nationals, the jihadists and the Taliban. I am disappointed sometimes that we base our judgments on a superficial knowledge, or lack thereof, as to the efforts that are being made in Afghanistan vis-à-vis development. We are there. We are developing that country.

I am from there. I would say stop if all things were equal, but I am saying no, do not stop, because all things are not equal. I am from there. I know it. I know every nook and cranny of that country and that area. I ask members to please educate themselves and support the motion.

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate in the House today with a lot of interest.

It is also somewhat alarming to hear members of other political parties attempt to define the New Democratic Party's position. They are incorrect. The Bloc members are incorrect when they say that we would abandon Afghanistan. That has never been the position that we have taken.

However, regarding the remarks from the member from Streetsville, I heard a very interesting interview with Sarah Chayes just this week. She has been in Kandahar since the fall of the Taliban and actually came to visit us when we were in Afghanistan with the defence committee, and gave us her views on what has been happening the last five or six years in Kandahar province.

What she said in that interview is that sadly, the people of southern Afghanistan and Kandahar are shaken down by their own government during the day, because the corruption is so high, and then shaken down by the Taliban at night.

I would like to ask the member this question. Why did he vote in opposition to extending the mission when that was raised by the political party he was with before? Why did he vote against extending the mission in the first place?

**Mr. Wajid Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I voted against it at that time, not because I was against the mission. I wanted an educated debate where people are well informed. This government, over the period of time, has been more open and transparent, and has informed

Canadians and informed this House, and that is why we are having this educated debate, which did not happen for four years.

This government came into power four years after the Afghan commitment, so we must realize the benefits of what this government has done. I support the mission wholeheartedly. We are discussing it, but I would also urge my colleagues to stop and to give up the urban myths that they hear from certain quarters and look at the reality on the ground. Nobody is saying it is a perfect place. Nobody is saying that 100% development will satisfy us, but the fact of the matter is that development is making progress.

• (1240)

**Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this House today to take part in this debate on Canada's mission in Afghanistan. I do so without hesitation, in support of our role in this multilateral, UN sanctioned and NATO led endeavour.

I also speak with the deepest appreciation and respect in support of our fellow Canadians who work and fight on our behalf in Afghanistan. As chairman of the Standing Committee on National Defence, I have had the honour of travelling to Afghanistan to witness their work and meet the sons and daughters of Canada who, far from family and home, toil for us and for Canada. They are so much more than ranks in uniforms. They are fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. They are our neighbours. They are our friends. They are our fellow Canadians.

Today our duty in this chamber is one of solemn importance as we are debating a commitment that Canada has made and will make both to the people of Afghanistan and to our allies. This commitment is enshrined in the Afghanistan Compact, an international agreement that provides a framework for cooperation between the Afghan government and the international community. Agreed to at the beginning of 2006 by more than 60 nations and organizations, the compact sets out benchmarks in the priority areas of security, governance and socio-economic development.

Canada's mission is multi-faceted and we continue to respond to evolving challenges by assessing and rebalancing our efforts, promoting security to secure development and governance. Our soldiers continue to provide security for the Afghan people. Our development workers provide means of survival, progress and prosperity. Our diplomats nurture a fledgling democracy in its infancy. As a whole, as Canadians, they are building a better Afghanistan for tomorrow.

As our fellow Canadians continue their work in Afghanistan, we too now undertake our part of the mission as we consider future direction. As Canada's elected leaders, it is our solemn duty to decide the matter of Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

Our soldiers, diplomats and development workers are following this debate. The government and people of Afghanistan wait with hopeful anticipation. The 37 nations with which we are allied in Afghanistan look on, and we can rest assured that our enemies are mindful of this debate as well.



*Government Orders*

All are watching with keen interest because Canada's active role in building peace and prosperity in Afghanistan is critical and is making a difference. While the challenges we face are complex and diverse, real progress throughout the country in the last few years is providing hope for a better future. Our efforts, combined with those of other donors and our growing network of dedicated partners on the ground, are paying dividends.

Our commitment has helped introduce democracy to Afghanistan. Presidential and parliamentary elections have been held, a new constitution has been adopted, and women represent more than one-quarter of parliamentarians. Canadians can be proud that we stood firmly by the Afghan people as these transformations took place.

Today, this government is also helping Afghans participate in grassroots democracy through the election of more than 19,000 community development councils across Afghanistan. These councils are elected at the local level, much like we elect municipal governments in Canada, to make decisions on community priorities.

Once development projects are identified, the work is carried out by locals. This approach ensures that Afghans have ownership over projects, which range from improving drinking water and transportation systems to providing irrigation and electrical power while strengthening education and health care.

In Kandahar province alone, more than 530 community development councils have been elected and more than 630 projects have been completed to date. These projects are providing lasting benefits to households and communities. This is due in large part to the fact that Afghans themselves are leading their own development.

Canada is also providing a safer world for the Afghan people. Canadians have assisted in the confiscation of 16,000 heavy weapons and the disarming of 63,000 former combatants. We are now focusing on training an Afghan national army and an Afghan national police force.

I have met with members of Afghan national army and the national police and have seen their commitment to peace. These are brave people working under extremely harsh conditions. We are working with these brave Afghan men and women, providing them with the tools and training to one day be the keepers of their own safety and security.

● (1245)

Canada is also addressing the terrible threat of landmines. Our contribution to demining programs has assisted in the prevention of countless deaths and crippling injuries. As stated earlier, many of the victims are children. The number of landmine victims has decreased by 55% over the levels from five years ago.

When my colleagues and I were in Afghanistan just over a year ago and went through the military hospital at Kandahar airfield, the doctors and nurses had just finished patching up a local Afghan person who had stepped on a landmine. They had put him back together. He was in tough shape but it looked to me as though his legs had been saved. This is the kind of work that goes on every day, which Canadians do not know about and need to know about.

We are helping to improve the Afghan economy. The country's per capita annual income doubled between 2002 and 2007. Through our

support for Afghan national programs, we are contributing to the growth by helping to create the jobs that are key to reducing poverty.

We are also helping to grow the economy through our world-leading support for Afghan microfinance programs. The parliamentary secretary talked about this earlier. Microfinancing programs make financial services available to Afghans for the people who are unable to access financing through any other source. There is no banking system in that country.

This microfinance program has helped more than 418,000 Afghans undertake income generating activities for the creation of small businesses and for the assistance of farming operations.

At the Standing Committee on National Defence, one female witness who appeared was from Afghanistan. She said that the repayment rate on these microfinance loans is 95%. Most of them go to women and the 5% of them that do not get paid back are loans to men. She said that tongue in cheek, but it was interesting that she would say that.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** It's probably true.

**Mr. Rick Casson:** My colleague says it is probably true.

This additional income is literally transforming lives as families can now afford to send their children to school, access health care and provide basic necessities.

Canada is promoting health and education in Afghanistan. Education has been one of the great success stories in the ongoing development and reconstruction of that country.

Our investment has made a real and measurable difference in rebuilding schools, supplying learning materials, paying teachers' wages and providing teacher education. Close to 6 million children are now attending school, one-third of them girls. This is a major achievement considering that only 700,000 children were in school in 2001 and not one of them was a girl.

As a result of improved access to medical care for women, the infant mortality rate in Afghanistan has dropped by almost 25% since 2001.

We are promoting the rule of law in Afghanistan. Reconstruction efforts will fail unless democratic institutions are established that can ensure security, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Canada's governance programs help ensure that laws are both just and arrived at democratically. They support independent, effective institutions that enforce those laws so that everyone will feel safe in their communities and homes.

As we can see, there is much that we are accomplishing in Afghanistan. With the continued support of Canada and the international community, much more can still be accomplished. In fact, much more must be accomplished.

*Government Orders*

Throughout the history of this House, there have been no decisions more difficult than the decision to send our brave men and women into harm's way. Likewise, this House has rarely undertaken decisions more important than the decision to fight for freedom, to fight for what is right.

These decisions are of tremendous gravity for many reasons. They are important because of the necessity for those who are free to assist those who are not free. As Canadians, inhabitants of the true north strong and free, we have undertaken to assist in the establishment of an Afghanistan that will also be strong and free.

From the beaches of Normandy to the shores of Hong Kong, the fields of Vimy and the hills of Korea, Canadians have gone when they were needed for the pursuit of freedom. Just as Canadians fought and died for the freedom of our friends in Holland, France, Korea and many other places, Canadians have fought and died for the freedom that we are building with our friends in Afghanistan.

As we debate this motion here in the House of Commons, it is my sincere hope that we will all undertake our duty as members of Parliament with the same fidelity to duty and conviction that I have witnessed in our men and women in uniform.

Our fight in Afghanistan continues. We do not fight for empire or profit. We fight for freedom: the freedom of self-determination, the freedom from fear, and the freedom to prosper. In short, we are fighting so that one day the Afghan people may enjoy the same freedoms and peace that we possess here in Canada.

This government fully acknowledges that there is a long way to go. That is why we are one of the world's leading nations in the fight to restore peace and freedom in Afghanistan. It is also why we are continuously exploring ways to improve how we conduct our mission. The recent report by John Manley also offers some good suggestions in this regard and our government is committed to responding to them.

● (1250)

A lot of work lies ahead. Rebuilding a country ravaged by decades of civil unrest, violence and abject poverty requires time. Addressing the various challenges that continue to obstruct Afghans in their daily lives requires unwavering commitment, but we are on the right track and we must continue. The free world and the Afghan people are counting on our support.

I hope that all members of the House will do what is right and send the strongest possible message to all of those watching that Canada's resolve is strong and we support without reservation our brave men and women in this most difficult of tasks.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech, which carried the government's message. He talked about the difficulty in the decision making on Afghanistan and I appreciate his point of view. Coming from a party that has had a consistent position on the Afghanistan issue over the two years that I have been in Parliament, I too feel the incredible strain that comes with making decisions like this.

I would say for my hon. colleague that we have witnessed in some cases the demonization of people in our caucus who are standing up

and speaking for about 50% of Canadians, who wish to see the mission end. Does my hon. colleague not agree that if he wants to bring some civility and clarity to this issue he must respect and his party must acknowledge the consistency and the importance of what our party says as well?

**Mr. Rick Casson:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that what we are doing here today and what we did here yesterday in bringing this motion to the House of Commons and having this debate certainly does allow everyone in the House, no matter what position they take, to express their opinions.

You bet, Mr. Speaker, that there is disagreement. I totally disagree with the member's position.

I certainly disagree with the separatist party's position on this as well. We just had the Van Doos in Afghanistan doing a tremendous job in fighting for freedom, while here in the House there is a bunch of people who are here to tear apart this country and are not supporting this mission. Their own neighbours are over there fighting and they still do not support the mission.

This goes far beyond the House and the politics of this place. This is something that is Canadian. In my mind, it has nothing to do with what party we are from. This has to be a decision that is made in our hearts. If we cannot find it in our hearts to support this motion, to support what is happening, to support the people of Afghanistan and free them from the terror that they have lived under for so many years, I do not understand that. I think we all have it in our hearts to do that.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I very much agree with most of what the hon. member said in his contribution to the debate.

I think Canadians have heard quite a bit about the motion and about some of our intent, but there are some ancillary questions that do not seem to get addressed. One of them has to do with the poppy trade in Afghanistan, which, as members know, is one of the principal sources of funding terrorist activities. I wonder if the member is aware of some scenarios that can be considered to address this one element of the conflict related to Afghanistan.

**Mr. Rick Casson:** Mr. Speaker, certainly the poppy issue in Afghanistan is a tough one. The poppy trade is how a lot of people in that country make their living. It is how they feed their families. I think it is something that we need to address. It is in the Manley report and will be part of our deliberations as we move forward on Afghanistan. We have to find an alternative to that means of making a living.

When we were in Afghanistan we heard from witnesses. We were told that farmers can make more money raising pomegranates, grapes, nuts, or whatever it is that they traditionally did, than they can by raising poppies, but the fact of the matter is that there is no financing. Cashflow is an issue. They have to feed their families during the year. The drug lords and the warlords have them under their thumbs when they bring them money in the spring and tell them they will come back in the fall for the crop.

We have to put in a great deal of effort there and our government has. One of the first commitments the government made was for irrigation projects in that country. We have to expand the agricultural base. We have to give people the ability to improve their lot in life by supplying irrigation, a stable source of water, and by reconstruction of some of the systems that were there.

When we were in Afghanistan, we were fortunate enough to fly over part of the country in a couple of helicopters. I was impressed by how much development there was and how much green area there is along the rivers. I think we have to concentrate on giving the people who make a living off poppies an alternative. If we work really hard and put our minds to it, we can come up with a strong economy there, based on agriculture.

• (1255)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

I am pleased to participate in the debate today on the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. I fully support our leader's approach, which means that the mission must change, the mission must have a stop date and the mission must be more than a military mission.

However, I hope to broaden the conversation to put in proper context the ongoing relationship between Canada and the people of Afghanistan, particularly the women of Afghanistan.

During the nineties, when Sally Armstrong began writing about the women of Afghanistan in *Homemakers* magazine, Canadian women became aware of the situation in that country and wanted the Government of Canada to help.

Thousands of letters were received at the magazine, newspapers and MPs' offices. We came to know of the courageous work of Dr. Sima Samar, setting up the schools and clinics for young girls in defiance of the Taliban government. Dr. Samar was awarded the John Humphrey Freedom Award in the summer of 2001, before 9/11. She met with women members of Parliament here.

We participated in the Afghan Women's Association with Adeena Niazi, together with Marilou McPhedran and Sally Armstrong, in February 2002 at the Afghan women's leadership in governance training at York University.

We, as Canadian women, were in solidarity with these courageous women. We were in awe of them. Most of us born in Canada have never known what the absence of security feels like. We have taken peace for granted, peace in its fullest sense, not just the absence of war but the presence of justice.

When the fatwah was placed on Dr. Samar while she was still in Canada, Minister Graham responded immediately.

The debate today will reflect the friendship and the commitment of Canada to the people of Afghanistan. This is not just about a military mission. It must be about our commitment to do everything we can to work with the Afghan people to build peace and security for the long term.

My remarks are influenced by the friendships and ongoing dialogue with Afghan Canadians, like Adeena Niazi, Sheenkai

### *Government Orders*

Tahiri, and her wonderful family, by my trip to Afghanistan in 2007 with the defence committee and a town hall meeting we held last spring in my riding of St. Paul's, but also by my respect for a history of multilateralism and the commitment Canada made in the Afghan compact in 2006.

[*Translation*]

To change the 2006 commitment, for our support of multilateral approaches, for the framework of cooperation principles for the next five years, we have the Afghanistan Compact. The Afghan government articulated its overarching goals for the well-being of the Afghan people: security; governance, rule of law and human rights; and economic and social development.

A further vital and cross-cutting area of work is eliminating the narcotics industry, which remains a formidable threat to the people and state of Afghanistan, the region and beyond.

Furthermore, genuine security remains a fundamental prerequisite for achieving stability and development in Afghanistan. Security cannot be provided by military means alone.

• (1300)

[*English*]

When we signed this, it was clear that we were going to help. The debate today is that we need to help in a different way but, nonetheless, committed.

It is true that before I went to Kandahar I probably thought, like so many Canadians, that it would be possible to just pick up and move to a less dangerous area. We all knew that the work Canada was doing with the PRT in Kandahar was based on relationships, on principles, such as every soldier a teacher, and on a commitment to help the Afghan national army achieve a contingent of 70,000 people by 2009 that would be effective.

We were surprised in Afghanistan to learn how the military was actually helping within the bureaucracy of the government of Kabul, helping in ministers' offices and teaching organizations how to pick great chiefs of staff and develop work plans. We know that our military has been very good at this but we think there needs to be more of a role for the diplomatic core, as well as CIDA.

I, too, like the previous speaker, was impressed when we went to the hospital at Kandahar airfield. I could not believe the severity of cases that were taken on by the team, such as the huge piece of shrapnel that was successfully removed from an Afghani's face at the base because of the CT scanner. Colonel Boddam, the psychiatrist, explained the real progress that had been made in post-traumatic stress prevention, screening and treatment because of the interventions of the previous Liberal government and people like Senator Dallaire.

*Government Orders*

It seems the incidences, because of the preventive measures, are much less than they would have predicted. However, they were hugely grateful for the American medevac helicopters but the fact is that we still need to rely so much on others. It was interesting that even there we were desperate to know more about the 3D approach. We wanted to know if it was working. We also wanted to know why we saw mostly defence and not so much diplomacy or development.

The briefing was clear on the ground at the PRT by Simon Hetherington that the 3D was supposed to be his board of directors. We did not see, while we were in Afghanistan, that was being reflected in the cabinet room or here in Ottawa. It seemed to be very disorganized.

We were impressed to learn that less than 1% of the projects built via the national solidarity plan had been damaged because of the Canadian way. Canadians want to know how they want things done. It is done in a totally collaborative way, bottom up, with local ownership in the planning and execution, even though 70% of that population was illiterate, including the bureaucracy and the director of education.

There have been real achievements, the Summit Road clearly the greatest. As soldiers said to us, they were built with Canadian blood and paved with Canadian dollars. Some of the achievements have been medical clinic repairs, security infrastructure, the confidence of the Afghan police, schools reopening, irrigation and soccer, but it was very clear that the goal was capacity building, not capacity replacement. Setting the conditions for sustainable success, they realized that this needed an Afghan face and an Afghan pace.

It is an old adage that it is better to teach people to fish than to give them a fish and it has been renewed by the explanation that the Canadian bottom up approach is now to be a pipeline instead of a water tanker.

We were totally impressed by the cash for work program run by Warrant Officer Healey. An article in *Legion Magazine* said that an amazing school teacher from Barrie, Ontario, who happens to be a reservist, now has been named the prince of Panjwai. The cash for work program was very much part of winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan youth with the idea that they could work for us instead of the Taliban.

In the briefing at the national military college, it was heartening to hear that they felt they were getting to their optimal 70,000 soldiers without compromising equality, but that they still might need specialty teams that would need mentoring and help, though the goal of self-sufficiency was close at hand. Every soldier we talked to at lunch had the mantra, "every soldier a teacher".

When we met with Sarah Chayes, the American journalist who chose to take a break from her career as a journalist in public radio to stay in Afghanistan, she was very worried that the discourse from Canada was far too simplistic.

• (1305)

We cannot reduce the discussion to stay or go, to less military or to more construction. Sarah wanted everybody to understand that this was not about an insurgency as much as it was about protecting Afghans from invaders who were using Afghans as fodder. She believed that security was essential to any humanitarian assistance

and that economic development and good governance must go hand in hand.

As we go forward, it is important that we listen to the voices of the Afghan women here in Canada who are in daily touch with their people and their colleagues in their home country.

There is no question that when speaking to Adeena Niazi she believes that although the military component is important, there should be much greater emphasis on development assistance, more emphasis not only on the Taliban but on the warlords and more emphasis on what to do about the poppies and the drug problem which contributes to the insecurity.

There is much discussion on strengthening the civil society. There was great disappointment that the Manley report did not reference the need for promoting civil society, particularly the enhancement of women's organizations.

I would like to quote from Adeena Niazi who said, "Finally, the debate in Parliament should be firmly rooted in a commitment to the universality of human rights. It's going to have to include a lot more Afghan voices, particularly women's voices".

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend's remarks with great interest today because we travelled together to Afghanistan. I recall a lot of the information that she shared from that trip.

The member for St. Paul's mentioned Sarah Chayes. I listened to a very interesting interview with Sarah on Sunday or Monday of this week where she gave out quite a bit of information. As the member opposite said, Sarah has been in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban. She stays in Kandahar and operates a soap making factory with Afghan people. She is very committed to the people of Kandahar.

Two of the remarks that Sarah made in that interview really gave me pause for thought. When we were in Afghanistan, Sarah talked to us about the dreadfully high level of corruption and the people's distrust of their own government. In this recent interview, she said that the people of Kandahar were shaken down by their own government during the day and then shaken down by the Taliban in the evening. She said that they had no recourse and that they were trapped by two opposing factions, one, the government that we are supporting, and the other one, the insurgents.

After the fall of the Taliban, Sarah said that she used to drive from Kandahar City to Kabul in safety. It was not an easy drive along a dirt road but she said that she could make that drive in relative safety. She said that it was no longer safe to travel on that road even though it was paved. I think Canadians had the expertise and took part in paving that road but it is no longer safe to travel. This indicates what the UN has been saying about the rise in insecurity, the rise in IEDs and the lack of progress.

*Government Orders*

I would ask my colleague to comment on the two comments that Sarah Cheyes made and the lack of improvement and security in Kandahar.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I think one of the concerns of Canadians is the issue of ground casualties. A lot of the casualties, whether one was a development worker or a member of the military, have resulted from just driving down the road. This speaks to the fact that until we can get the road secure, the call for helicopters is important because they are the safer way to travel.

As Sarah clearly said, she was concerned that the regular people were disaffected by a government that does not seem to be helping them. This speaks to the fact that the Manley report around signature projects is wrong. We not only want to help the Afghan government gain the confidence of its own people, but we also want to help it deal with the obvious corruption.

When we were there, Sarah Cheyes clearly said that she wanted Canada to be tougher. She wants us to follow the development dollars and ensure they get where they belong in terms of helping with education, which is the immunization against corruption and against people not knowing.

As both Sally Armstrong and Adeena Niazi said to me at my town hall meeting, illiterate Afghan women feel they are blind because they cannot see what is going on.

We need more presence on the ground to ensure security for the development to take place and to work side by side with civil society. Out of that education and out of that security will come peace.

• (1310)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I too want to participate in this debate. I have written a couple of pieces on this. Those who are interested can read them on my website.

I noted yesterday that the government launched this debate by putting forward the Minister of National Defence. Clearly the debate is really about a military mission; it is not about anything else. Otherwise the government would have led off with the Prime Minister or with the Minister of Foreign Affairs because this would have been a truly Canadian mission.

Let me underscore the fact we are debating a motion that has become a Canadian motion in view of the fact that the government has borrowed so heavily on the Liberal amendment to present for debate. However, this is not a Canadian mission. It is a NATO mission in which Canada participates. Our focus should be addressing the questions that Canadians everywhere are asking about the way we are approaching the Canadian role in this NATO mission. We should be asking the questions that would truly address the concerns of Canadians such as, why are we there? We need to justify that. However, we cannot discuss, as my colleague has done so eloquently, issues that are not related to the military component of that mission.

The government clearly has one objective, and that is to debate the status quo, period. It has said that it wants to extend the status quo, nothing else. To confuse the issue for everyone, it put together a panel of experts, who have a variety of experience, although I am not

sure if Afghanistan was one of them. They have acquired a lot of expertise and presented a report upon which the government has based all of its arguments to stay the course and to expend more energy, resources and personnel from Canada.

After 477 interviews, submissions and presentations, the panel could not come up with one reason for having Canada in Afghanistan, one reason that we had not heard from all types of spins in the previous couple of years, one reason that would justify, for all Canadians, expending \$6.1 billion to date in a military mission and \$1.2 billion in aid. I do not suggest that the reasons were not there. I suggest that the basis for discussion is not there. Why is it not there? If we are really discussing what Canada should do in Afghanistan, perhaps we would examine what the panel report told us.

The panel has said that for every dollar in development aid, \$12 are spent on military expenditures. For every dollar on development aid, only 15¢ is spent on signature Canadian aid programs. Therefore, it is important for everyone to understand that if we are to have a serious debate on Afghanistan, we should take a look at who sets the objectives, who has established the goals, who has established the performance criteria upon which continuing presence by all NATO partners will be validated and by what measures we will then judge the success of that mission.

I do not think this is about supporting the troops. We cannot allow ourselves to be blindfolded by this kind of rhetoric. Of course we all support the troops. We ask them to go there and give their lives.

What is it really about? Is it about transforming a society, as I hear from some of the debates? What society are we trying to transform? Is it the tribal society that has existed for millennia? Is it maybe the ideologically driven society of the day which happens to be Islamist or jihadist? Is that who we are fighting? Is it the rural society that is established in an elevation on this part of the world that begins at 4,000 metres and goes up? Is it a society that is already geographically and politically isolated from virtually everybody else, including its immediate adjacent countries, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan and even China?

• (1315)

I do not think the basis for the debate, the expert panel's report, demonstrated an understanding of all the dynamics. If it could not, I do not know how we could expect the government to understand it. For example, one of the issues raised by the panel was we needed to depend much more on the diplomacy that had to emerge and developed in that area, especially given the circumstances in Pakistan, and I agree. However, that is all it said.

*Government Orders*

It does not say, for example, that 70% of all the material and resources, human and physical, that we bring into Afghanistan has to go through Pakistan and that we have to build a partnership with the country, the like of which we have not yet done. It does not say, for example, that 40,000 Taliban, and I call them guerillas, or they can be called terrorists or insurgents, are in the border states adjacent to Pakistan. Only about 20,000 Taliban are on the Afghan side of the border.

It does not explore, for example, the contributions made to disrupt the order and stability of the area by Iran, Saudi Arabia and by the north African countries that are interested in expelling many of their militants and sending them off to another part of the world eliminating the immediacy of the problem for themselves. They are all players in that part of the world. The panel says that 40,000 Pakistan Taliban are refurbishing, renewing and re-energizing the Afghan Taliban, and we know nothing about them. There is no discussion.

Billions of dollars are going in from donor nations to compete with our hundreds of millions of dollars. I would have liked to have seen a discussion about alternatives. Of course we want to be there to ensure we protect our interests. We want to know what those interests are. Is it, for example, the issue of ensuring that every child in Afghanistan gets a proper education? Who can say, no? Tell me how we do that when we spend \$12 on guns and soldiers for every \$1 we spend on development aid. That is just the Canadian contribution.

If someone wants to speak to me about the safety of our troops, please look at the report. See if the report can find an explanation for why the incidence of casualties is more than double among Canadians than it is among any other participant that has more than 2,000 troops in the area. Please tell us why the number 1,000 appeared magically out of the air. If 1,000 more troops could solve the problems of the world, I would be first guy to volunteer. The fact is General Hillier has said on two separate occasions, that he cannot get soldiers and that we should reform our immigration system so we can bring people in to fight for us so they could then accelerate their application for immigration. Just the other day he said that we needed at least 2,500 more troops.

I think we have a moving target. That is okay. I just want to know what the performance criteria are for judgment when the question comes up again in the House. I want to know whether we have explored the alternatives to long term solutions such as to revert back to a robust peacekeeping role that will then transfer itself into a greater role for the United Nations to bring in all the people who play in that area.

• (1320)

My colleague said that we should give it an Afghan face, as we did not many years ago in Cambodia when we brought in the Khmer Rouge, an especially murderous regime. We need a solution that is long term and lasting. I hope this debate will cause that to surface.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague had some good points and some good questions. I have a couple of comments and questions.

First, if we do not know why we are there, then why in 2004 did the Liberals send us there in the first place, with no discussion in the House? It seems like a reasonable question.

I point out a fact that he has used very disingenuously, and it has been used very disingenuously by other people in the House. He said that we spent \$1 in development aid for every \$12 in military. A unit, however we want to measure that, of aid cost is an awful lot less than a unit of military assistance.

The other point he misses, and people continually miss it, is the fact that within the \$12 of military expenditures are Canadian soldiers who actually do the development. They are out there digging wells, operating clinics, having councils, doing the construction work and doing the job. There is a lot more in that \$12 than just military. I think the hon. member knows that and he should admit it. Some people down the road will never admit that, but it is for other reasons.

We have talked about doing more than military. We have talked about developing. The previous speaker talked about getting rid of corruption. All of those things are very important. Could the hon. member comment on the work of the Strategic Advisory Team specifically in that area? What does he think of the work that has been done and how we might expand it?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Speaker, I can be very specific about the reasons why we went there in the first place. I happened to be in cabinet when the request came in to go into the kind of mission, which the parliamentary secretary is now defending and that we are debating.

The answer then was, no, that we wanted to be in a development cycle. We wanted to ensure we would put funds to use that would be in the main part of the reconstruction of Afghanistan, or the development of that part of Afghanistan. We did not recognize we had the military capacity to make an impact that would justify making a decision. In other words, we did not want to set ourselves up to fail. Rather we wanted to set ourselves up to succeed, where we could succeed.

When that side of the House came to government, the very first thing it did was change the mission, but call it an extension, and it has become a much more military mission. It is the government's right to make those kinds of decisions. I do not disagree. I did not vote for going in, but this is where we make those decisions and that is fine.

When the member asks me what I think about the development of some of the other areas and issues that are important, I agree with it. Yes, I would like to make an impact on Afghanistan as in every other part of the world.

I will finish off with this. Last night I was at a function where people talked about the clash of ideologies. I would like to have our ideology accepted by everybody. I am not sure one would do it at the point of—

*Government Orders*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Western Arctic.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thought my hon. colleague's presentation was quite rational. He did speak about the Manley report and the fact that it did not seem to go where he wanted it to go. Quite clearly, that is the case for many of us.

Evidence has been presented that the Manley report was a compilation of ideas that Manley himself expressed before the panel was set up. At the same time, we know the writing of the document was carried out by the defence team wrote, which has given us most of the public direction on the government's policy in Afghanistan to start with.

The process of coming to an understanding of Afghanistan through the Manley report is very flawed. Would he not agree?

• (1325)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Speaker, I recognize sort of a very faint compliment there and I will accept it for what it is.

If the member wants to score a point, let me underscore the point. If the chairman of that panel responded to a question relative to his suggestion that he had already had these views before he wrote the report, his answer would be that if one asks the same question then one gets the same answer.

What I propose today is this. Why do we not ask all the other questions that have not been asked? If we can get an answer from the government on all of those, then we can support the government. It is as simple as that.

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Abbotsford.

I have been following the debate with a lot of interest today, as I did last night as well. I cannot go on with my speech without first making reference to our troops who are serving on the front lines in Afghanistan representing their country, and to our development forces, the people who are working hard on provincial development and construction teams.

I am sure most members receive *Veritas Magazine*. The current issue features one of our fallen soldiers, Captain Matthew Dawe, representing one of the 79 soldiers who have fallen, a fine Canadian young man. A fine family gave up a son who was over in Afghanistan serving our nation and doing tremendous work as part of a NATO led coalition, a UN sponsored mission, trying to bring that country into the modern era. It is a tremendous undertaking in this decade.

The purpose of this debate is to discuss why we are there, and some interesting information is coming forward in that regard.

Being from Nanaimo—Alberni, I am probably as far away from Ottawa as one could get in Canada, perhaps with the exception of the member from the Arctic. We do not have a large military presence in my riding, other than a very large contingent of retired military, but we do have a reservist unit in our area, the 5th (B.C.) Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery, based in Victoria and up in Nanaimo. At least one of my constituents, Eric McNealy, is serving

in Afghanistan right now. Certainly our thoughts and prayers are with him and with all of our forces over in Afghanistan.

There has been some discussion about the Manley panel report. It was not that long ago that the Canadian government commissioned five distinguished Canadians to go to Afghanistan to interview people. They spent three months conducting more than 470 interviews. They interviewed people on the ground in Afghanistan. They interviewed aid workers and other of our NATO allies over there. They thoroughly examined the issues.

It was disappointing to me, as a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence, that when it came time to bring the Manley panel before the committee to hear their observations and to ask them questions, that did not happen. Whether we agree with their conclusions or not, it seems to me it is the responsibility of committee members to listen to their observations. For years I served on the health committee, and whether it was the Romanow report or the Kirby report from the Senate, if it had to do with health, we wanted to interview the people because we wanted to contribute to the debate.

It was rather disturbing that the members of the opposition in both the national defence committee and the foreign affairs committee turned down the opportunity to have the Manley panel appear. Members could have asked questions in order to have a more fulsome debate on that very well-informed document about the future role of Canada in Afghanistan. It is about why we are there, what we are doing, what we are accomplishing, what the facts on the ground are. The members of the panel had the privilege of spending three months reviewing this issues. Most members of Parliament have not had the opportunity to examine the issues in-depth that these distinguished panellists had.

That was a very large opportunity for the members serving on those committees to inform themselves and better enter into this debate today and it was missed. I think the tone of some of the questions reflects a lack of information and members would have been well served by reading the report, if not taking that opportunity to actually have the panel members at committee and get the answers to their questions.

We heard the minister of state a short time ago talk about her experience in Afghanistan with the women and the impact of the microfinance programs. We have to understand that Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world and we are trying to help out. A microfinance loan for as little as \$100 can help a woman who has lost her husband. Many thousands of women are widowed because their husbands were killed by the Taliban. They are raising their children. A simple microfinance loan could help them establish a small business, feed their family and help them get their children an education in order to move ahead and create a local economy. It was mentioned that 90% of those very small loans are being repaid, which is probably a good lesson for some government programs we have seen around here, where large loans are made and not repaid, but that is another story.

*Government Orders*

● (1330)

The microfinance loans are being repaid. We heard a comment that perhaps the 5% of loans that are not paid are those that are given to men. It is a great thing that we are over there helping to create a local economy, especially with the women, and allowing them to establish a business, whether it is baking bread for their family and neighbours, or whether it is a small business of another nature.

Why are we in Afghanistan? We hear this question being asked. It puzzles me because there are many reasons that we are there. We are accomplishing things. The first and most important thing to say is that we are part of a NATO led, UN sanctioned international security assistance force, commonly called ISAF.

The role of ISAF is to restore security to allow the rebuilding of Afghanistan to continue. There is development and reconstruction work, the building of roads, bridges, schools and hospitals for example, which can only take place when civilian workers and the projects they are working on are themselves safe from harm. This is the secure space that Canada's military and our international partners are there to provide.

We are there as part of a coalition of some 37 nations. Most of them are NATO nations, but there are other allies as well. The member opposite asked why it is that for every \$1 that is spent on aid another \$12 are spent on the military? We heard the parliamentary secretary address that a moment ago. Our soldiers are not only over there doing military work, but they are actually part of the reconstruction team. They are building the roads and bridges. We hope to outline some of the great projects they have done in a very difficult area.

It is true what the member suggests. There are other members who have suggested that we should pull out of a very difficult assignment in Kandahar province. The previous Liberal government sent us to that area. It deliberately chose that province knowing it would be a tough assignment. We might have had an easier assignment building in Kabul where there is much more security, or in the north of Afghanistan where security is not as big an issue. Frankly, our troops are on the front line making it possible for all the great successes in other areas.

If our troops were not holding the line in the south and countering the insurgency coming in from the south, which is the volatile and unruly area, then reconstruction efforts throughout the entire country would be in peril. We would be foolish to think that if insurgents were capable of overrunning Kandahar province that they would stop there, that they would not turn their attention to Helmand province on the other side and other provinces and roll right back into Kabul and continue their tyranny throughout the entire country.

We are on the front lines in a very difficult spot. Our troops have paid the price. They are doing their duty in an admirable way. As Canadians, we should be very proud of that.

I visited our military base in Trenton over the summer. Our transport squadrons are based there. I was very impressed with the morale in the military and with the focus, discipline and camaraderie on that very large base. There are some 3,500 military and civilian personnel there. They have the tough assignment of receiving their

fallen comrades back on behalf of the entire country because the planes land in Trenton.

It is commendable that Canadians have taken it upon themselves without prompting, without being encouraged or told to do it, to line up on that highway which we now refer to as the Highway of Heroes whenever a fallen countryman returns home.

Why are we in Afghanistan? Let me talk about education. More than six million children, one-third of them girls, are now enrolled in school in 2007-08. Under the Taliban back in 2001 there were only 700,000 children, boys only, in school. The economy has doubled. Community development is moving ahead. There are more than 19,000 community development councils, more than 10 vocational training initiatives in Kandahar. The number of tuberculosis cases has declined. Childbirth statistics are improving. The number of deaths of women during childbirth is down and the infant mortality rate is down. Those are all good reasons for being in Kandahar and in Afghanistan.

I could go on for some time, but I will conclude with this point, that more than five million refugees have returned since 2002 and more than 365,000 in 2007. Ninety per cent of those returnees are finding jobs within six months of their return.

We are making a difference in a very difficult part of the world. Our Canadian Forces are admired. They have taken on a tough assignment. We are doing the rebuilding that is necessary and we are making progress. I hope all members will stand together to show our forces that we are standing with them at this time.

● (1335)

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is no question that we and all Canadians have stood behind our men and women in the military and will continue to stand behind our men and women in the military.

The member talked about the Manley report not being brought to committee. Does he think it is fair that the report of the defence committee, which he now sits on and which laboured for months and months, was not even looked at by his leader, the Prime Minister? He talked about not being fair. Even the recommendations in that report are part of what put it together.

The member talked about a NATO coalition. Does he think it is fair that only Canada and maybe another nation are in the difficult zone? Why does the rest of the NATO family not participate equally?

With respect to children going to school, when President Karzai was here, he said there were 200,000 fewer students going to school than there were the year before. We do not have the actual numbers, but let us call spade a spade.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Mr. Speaker, I am sure there are kids in Canada who are not in school when they are supposed to be, but whatever the exact numbers are, I am sure they change from day to day. It is a difficult task for kids going to school in this area. It is a difficult task for families trying to rebuild. There is still instability in some areas, but it is getting better all the time. Since our forces have made a concerted effort to root out those insurgents by going out and chasing them down, security has been improved.



*Government Orders*

We know what was happening when the Taliban was allowed free rule there. They came in and burned down the schools and killed the teachers.

There has been a great improvement in security, with all due respect to my colleague opposite. Our Canadian Forces recently helped to rebuild and pave the key Kandahar-Spin Boldak highway. It is crucial to have paved roads there, because IEDs cannot be planted effectively in paved roads.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to agree with some of the objectives of my colleague, and I want to be very specific.

He mentioned some of the successes. Those successes are the rationale that he says put us there and why we should continue to be there. Since we are focusing on schools, on hospitals and on roads, I am wondering whether he could tell us, at least in Kandahar province, how many schools we are going to build, how many teachers we are going to train, how many roads we are going to build, how many bridges we are going to construct, how many farms we are going to initiate, what the drainage system is like and what we are going to do.

Does he envisage the government coming forward and giving us a plan of all of these things which are not military secrets?

**Mr. James Lunney:** Mr. Speaker, we have heard some of that discussion related to his question already today.

We have not just decided that Ottawa will draw up a plan for rebuilding in Kandahar province, but like the other successful provincial reconstruction teams, Canada's model has been to ask the local officials and the local councils, and to consult on what projects would best help their communities prosper, such as building another bridge, which we recently did. There is the Arghandab River causeway joining highways 1 and 4, a tremendous project. We just built a well at Kandahar University, with a civil military cooperation team. These are great examples of responding to local needs and getting the job done so that the local economies can improve and life can be better in each of those communities.

● (1340)

**Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for clarification.

In listening to the debate, I have heard some members, mostly from the opposition, suggest that this is a military mission which this new government decided upon. That is absolutely incorrect. I would like some clarification.

My understanding is that the previous government sent our troops to Afghanistan without a vote. Then it sent them down to Kandahar, the most dangerous place in Afghanistan, also without a vote.

When I hear those members stand up and say what they have said, I want some clarification. Is it not true that not only did the previous Liberal government send our troops to Afghanistan without a vote, but it then decided to send them to Kandahar, the most dangerous place, without a vote? I want to know if there was ever an exit strategy on any of those decisions.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Order. It is becoming a little bit difficult to hear members from the farther end

of the chamber, so I would ask all hon. members to allow the member for Nanaimo—Alberni to answer the question, even though he has only a few seconds left.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Mr. Speaker, that was a very good question. It is obvious that the government opposite chose the Kandahar assignment. It was a tough—

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** We are the government?

**Mr. James Lunney:** Excuse me, that party opposite when it was in government. Thank you. It chose a very tough assignment for our forces. Everybody acknowledges that we cannot build without security. We have to get the security right in order to build.

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to engage in the debate on an issue that is of great importance to Canadians.

It has been said that this may be the most important debate that is taking place during the 39th Parliament. Why is that so? This debate is not about criminal justice in Canada. It is not about our economy. It is about Canada's place in the world and whether we will stand up and defend those Canadian values of freedom, democracy and human rights, not only at home but around the world.

Before I proceed, I want to pay a special tribute to the fine men and women serving our country overseas. Whether they are serving in the military, providing development assistance or strengthening the Afghan economy, they are making all Canadians proud of their accomplishments. The dedication and courage shown by them is an example of how to succeed under very trying circumstances. Their deeds have started to build a legacy that now needs to be strengthened even more.

Every day members of our armed forces put their lives on the line. In fact, my city of Abbotsford has experienced loss. Master Corporal Colin Bason died in Afghanistan serving our country, serving our community and, by all accounts, he understood the mission in Afghanistan and supported it. He believed in that mission and was prepared to lay down his life for that mission.

It has been said that this is a Canadian mission, and that is true, but it is also a mission that is sponsored by the United Nations. We have gone to Afghanistan under the auspices of NATO. This is not a Liberal or a Conservative mission, although it was the previous Liberal government that sent our troops to Afghanistan, that actually moved them from Kabul to Kandahar and put them in harm's way without imposing any conditions on that, not even a condition on rotation.

Today we have to re-examine that mission and ask, are we still doing the job we were sent to do? To do that we asked the hon. John Manley and a group of other distinguished Canadians to come together to investigate our role in Afghanistan to determine what successes are there, where the challenges are still great, and to provide a report.

That panel provided a report that we now commonly know as the Manley report. That report strongly supported continuing our mission in Afghanistan with a number of conditions.

*Government Orders*

We as a government have generally accepted those recommendations that were contained in the report. A number of those conditions were that we provide our troops with better equipment to make sure that they are better equipped to do the job they are supposed to do there, that they are better protected against the risks that are inherent in Afghanistan. We are also committed to making sure that they have more human resources; in other words, more military personnel to provide them with the support that they need.

We have also told them that we would like to have an end date for this mission, that we are working toward 2011 to make sure that the Afghan army is equipped to do the job itself; in other words, to provide the very security that it needs to rebuild the country into a vibrant democracy.

There has been much consideration given to whether this should be a peacekeeping mission or some other kind of mission. I want to remind the members of the House that before we could ever keep the peace, we have to make the peace.

Our focus in Afghanistan is to build a lasting peace for Afghans so that they can build their fledgling democracy, so that they can enjoy some of those fundamental human rights that all of us as Canadians take for granted, and that sometimes requires the use of force.

To suggest that Canada's history has always been one of peacekeeping misunderstands our history. We have to look back to world wars one and two, to the Korean conflict, to see that when required, Canadians stood for what was right and were prepared to make the sacrifices to make our world a better place to live, to defend democracy, to defend freedom around the world.

• (1345)

What are our successes there? I do not have an unlimited amount of time to regale the House with the successes we have had in Afghanistan. However, it has been repeated many times before in the House that today six million children in Afghanistan attend school. Six years ago there were 650,000 and none of them were girls. Today some two million girls attend school in Afghanistan. For democracy to flourish we need a strong education system even in Afghanistan.

We have improved basic health care dramatically for the Afghans. We have built thousands of miles of roads. We have actually encouraged the Afghans to start their own small businesses. In fact, the micro-loan program that our government sponsors through CIDA and through other Canadian NGOs has been a remarkable success. It is my understanding that there are some 350,000 new businesses that have been started up in Afghanistan.

I want to take note of one organization. It is the Mennonite Economic Development Associates, called MEDA. It is a Canadian NGO that is actually providing micro-finance loans to the Afghans so that they can start their own businesses. For example, a mother can purchase a small commercial oven and start baking, providing not only for her family but goods to sell in the open market, so that she can support her family and also grow the economy.

These are Canadian organizations that are doing this great work in Afghanistan, but they cannot do it without having the security that our armed forces provide. Let us make no mistake about it. Without

security, the rebuilding, the reconstruction, even the diplomacy could not work in Afghanistan.

Therefore, I am proud of the role Canada is playing. It is not only our armed forces. It is all the NGOs who are sacrificing and risking their lives there to make it a better place for the Afghans to live in.

I think we also have to remember that there are some 20 million Afghans who have thrown their lot in with our international community. As the House knows, Afghanistan now has a democratically elected president. He and his government have asked us to remain in Afghanistan because the alternative is unthinkable. To leave the Afghans without any security and just give the country back to the Taliban would be a mess. What a disaster that would be.

I hear talk from the NDP and the Bloc saying that we need to get our troops out of there. Yet, these very parties are the ones who claim to represent women. They claim to represent children, the marginalized, the poor and the disabled. However, if we withdraw our troops from Afghanistan, what will Afghans be left with? They will be living in fear of the Taliban.

Make no mistake about it. If the Taliban return to Afghanistan, it will be an international chaotic situation. Have we not learned our lessons from Rwanda? We need to provide the Afghans with the resources necessary to provide for their own security.

I am very encouraged by the position that our government has taken and the courage that our government and the Prime Minister have shown in stepping up to the plate and saying that we will not abandon Afghanistan.

The security created by our military presence in that region provides the needed protection to do the work that is required of us to make sure that Afghanistan has a bright future, to make sure the children there can look to us and count on us and to say, "We have depended on you. We have thrown in our lot with you. We have trusted you to complete the job at hand".

Today we are debating that particular mission. I encourage all members of the House to take seriously not only those Canadians who have already given their lives in defence of human values around the world but to take into consideration the risk that we impose on Afghanistan women, men, children, the disabled and the marginalized if we abandon them in this their time of need.

• (1350)

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our colleague has spent a great deal of his time talking about both the military requirement with respect to holding the security in Afghanistan, particularly in Kandahar, and he devoted some of his comments with respect to the progress that is coming through the reconstruction of schools, the courts, municipal institutions and so on. I think the whole House would agree that those two go very much hand in hand.

The Manley report was a balanced commentary on both of those initiatives, but it seems to me that Canadians want to have a bit more assurance that it is not just the 1,000 troops we are asking from NATO with respect to securing the peace, but also that all of our allies are engaged in the reconstruction initiatives the member talked about.

One of the suggestions has been that this become more visible if there were a report from the House either through the foreign affairs committee or another committee. I wonder if the member could speak for a moment on that and elaborate.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member referred to the Manley report as being a balanced report. That is true. What we are doing is tying reconstruction to security. Of course, we add to that the whole issue of diplomacy. We need to make sure that Afghanistan is a sustainable democracy in the long run.

I want to suggest to the member that as we move forward with providing the kind of reconstruction the Afghan people need, it is truly going to take a joint effort of all of the nations involved. As the member knows there are some 37 nations participating in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, most of them are involved in areas where there is little, if any, conflict.

Canada is serving in Kandahar, one of the most dangerous places in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister, our defence minister, our foreign affairs minister have all stated very clearly that it is time that others also take up some of that heavy work and do the heavy lifting required.

• (1355)

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have heard from the government benches quite often that we do not want to repeat Rwanda and if we do not pass this motion we are going to repeat Rwanda.

Comments made by Senator Roméo Dallaire referred to the fact that at the time when we were asked for troops in Kandahar, the previous government was also asked for troops for peacekeeping missions in the Congo. That should be put on the record because we did not send anyone at the time and we all know what happened in the Congo.

If we change the mission toward peace and reconciliation, that my party has asked for in an amendment, will that somehow—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Order. I will have to stop the hon. member there to allow the hon. member for Abbotsford time to respond.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** Mr. Speaker, I am not going to comment on the failings of the previous government.

What I want to do is ask this individual, why is he prepared to abandon women and children, abandon the poor and the marginalized in Afghanistan who are going to be taken advantage of if the Taliban ever returns?

We can talk about peace and diplomacy, but without being able to provide the security that Afghanistan needs, that the women, children and marginalized deserve and need, there is no point in discussing ongoing efforts to develop dialogues with the various tribes and stakeholders in Afghanistan.

My question is rhetorical because the member is not allowed to answer, but how can he justify taking our troops out of Afghanistan and leaving the women and children to their own devices? It does not make any sense to me.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** There are only 30 seconds left for questions and comments. If I have a 15 second

### *Statements by Members*

question from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I will allow a 15 second response.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, reading from a googled research paper, it says “Women in Taliban stronghold protest kidnap of US aid worker”. I will not read you the entire content, but I would like to hear what your views are on the fact that women, who 10 years ago would not dare speak out, are now protesting in—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I will not provide the answer to that, but maybe the hon. member for Abbotsford will.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** Mr. Speaker, that is one of the remarkable things about the work going on in Afghanistan. Six years ago, women were not even allowed to leave their homes without being in the company of their husbands or fathers. Today there is much more freedom to do the kinds of things required to build a successful democratic society that also defends human rights.

I am so pleased to see how even our international community and our Canadian NGOs are prepared to go into Afghanistan, risk their lives and do the kind of humanitarian work and reconstruction that give the Afghans real hope for the future.

I am so pleased that the member shares my views on this mission. She strongly supports it, as I do. I trust that other members of the House will look through all the rhetoric and will understand what is at stake with the motion before us today.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The time for questions and comments has expired. We will move on to statements by members.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

### WORLD HOCKEY CHALLENGE

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, from December 28, 2008 to January 4, 2009, the Alberni Valley on Vancouver Island will host the 2009 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge.

Five regional all-star teams from across Canada will compete against national teams from the U.S., Russia, Finland, Germany and Slovakia. The 32 game series will take place in Port Alberni, supported by Nanaimo, Parksville, Courtenay, Campbell River and Duncan.

The residents of Port Alberni are renowned for their can-do attitude. It is the only community in B.C. to host all four provincial games: the summer games, the winter games, the seniors games and the disability games.

Everyone can be sure that Port Alberni will make this an event to remember. The talent scouts will be there as these top-notch young athletes showcase their skills. Many are going to find their way to the NHL and other top hockey teams.

*Statements by Members*

The community has already invited the Prime Minister to attend. I would like to invite you, Mr. Speaker, all members and hockey enthusiasts from across the country to come on out to Port Alberni, escape the snow, visit Vancouver Island and witness some of the finest amateur hockey the world has to offer.

\* \* \*

• (1400)

**THE BUDGET**

**Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, over the past few years northwestern Ontario has been facing several challenges.

The forestry sector has been hit hard. Mills are shutting down, workers are being laid off and communities are struggling to survive.

All the while, our infrastructure is crumbling. New roads, bridges and water and sewer treatment plants are all projects that municipalities are desperate to move forward.

The government must recognize the importance and contributions of our region. For too long, municipalities and businesses in northwestern Ontario have been told what cannot be done.

Today is the day the government can tell northwestern Ontario what it can do.

The government can announce a comprehensive strategy to aid the ailing forest sector immediately, today. It can commit to ongoing funding for super flow-through shares, creating a favourable environment for mining investment. It can provide funding for much needed infrastructure projects in our region. It can close the gap between first nations communities and the rest of Canada.

These are all projects the government can do but the big question for everyone is this: will it?

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**BLAINVILLE'S PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY**

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, for many years, the Portuguese community has been flourishing in Blainville with its vibrant culture and deeply rooted family values. It is never easy to be accepted in a new place, so 10 years ago, the community began organizing a dinner and dance event to share its traditions.

Ida Tavaréz pioneered this annual event. She has devoted herself, body and soul, to helping Portuguese people who are new to the beautiful Blainville region integrate and develop a sense of belonging, and to raise funds for the parish. Her smile, her perseverance, and her dedication have made her a leader and a symbol of the vitality of our community.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I would like to congratulate Ms. Tavaréz on her 10 years of community involvement and tenacity, which have proven how open the people of Blainville are to welcoming new cultures into their midst.

[*English*]

**WINDSOR POLICE SERVICE**

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this Thursday marks the last day of Glenn Stannard's tenure as the city of Windsor police chief. After almost nine years in that position and 38 years as a Windsor police officer, he is going to retire.

Chief Stannard comes from a family dedicated to serving the public. His grandfather Walter, father Donald, uncles George and Earl and cousin Dave were all police officers, and his cousin Kim and daughter-in-law Kristina are both on the force today.

Glenn Stannard was appointed to the Windsor Police Service on May 1, 1970. He was promoted through the ranks within the Windsor Police Service and has worked in all divisions, including patrol, investigation and administration. He was appointed chief in 1999.

As former deputy chief Roger Mortimore stated, Chief Stannard "is a down-to-earth, unpretentious individual who made the force absolutely better".

Chief Stannard endeavoured to deploy the latest technology of modern policing while expanding and deepening outreach to the community.

Chief Stannard is a past president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. He has been involved in various organizations in the community, including junior achievement and the Special Olympics. The Governor General invested him with the Order of Merit and he is also a recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Award.

I extend congratulations to Chief Stannard for his work. All in the community celebrate him and congratulate him on his retirement.

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**SENIORS**

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this past week in my riding of Burlington, I held an important income tax seminar for seniors. The response was overwhelming.

I want to thank the over 200 seniors who attended and the officials from Service Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency for making excellent and detailed presentations.

After the seminar, it was clear to Burlington seniors that the recent tax changes introduced by this Conservative government are going to have a very significant positive impact on their own everyday lives.

From legislating pension income splitting to doubling the pension income tax credit and the increase in the personal tax exemption, Burlington seniors stand to save potentially thousands of their hard-earned dollars because of this Conservative government.

I am proud to be part of a Conservative government that believes our seniors deserve a break after a lifetime of building this great country. I am proud that this government believes we should return seniors' hard-earned dollars back to where the money belongs: in their hands.

*Statements by Members***FREDERICTON CONVENTION CENTRE**

**Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am gratified that after years of hard work and negotiations that began between the former federal government and the government of New Brunswick and the city of Fredericton, our community will be home to a new downtown convention centre.

The centre will accommodate 1,500 people. The 66,000 square foot building will include a six storey office complex as well as two parking garages with a capacity of 750 vehicles.

I am pleased that the federal and provincial governments will cover a combined third of the total cost of the \$24 million project. I particularly commend the city of Fredericton for pledging \$16 million, the remaining two-thirds.

This kind of investment is crucial to development in downtown Fredericton. Not only will it showcase our city and enhance business and employment opportunities, but the new convention centre will also have a positive economic impact on all of New Brunswick.

\* \* \*

• (1405)

[Translation]

**KRAFT HOCKEYVILLE 2008 CONTEST**

**Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the city of Roberval and the whole riding of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean are bursting with excitement. Roberval has been named as the first finalist in the Canadian Kraft Hockeyville 2008 contest.

This weekend, Roberval will be pleased to welcome a team from CBC, which will announce the second finalist during *Hockey Night in Canada*. On the ice of Lac Saint-Jean, we will celebrate the unity of our big, beautiful country, as we welcome viewers from across Canada.

This result would not have been possible without the tremendous organizational skills of the corporation of the town on ice in Roberval. A winter paradise on Lac Saint-Jean, this family community, made up of rinks, a skating oval and a walking path surrounded by 325 small houses, owes its existence to the hundreds of volunteers who do everything they can to make the town a success.

Canadians from sea to sea to sea can discover our beautiful natural surroundings, our winter festival, the amateur hockey tournament and, of course, the town on ice.

I pay tribute to the men and women of these organizations who turn the city into a winter playground. Congratulations Roberval, the first finalist in the Hockeyville 2008 contest.

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**SYLVAIN PLOURDE**

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, last Friday evening, the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region lost a guardian angel. Sylvain Plourde, Executive Director of Maison des sans-abri, passed away at a meeting with his idol, the singer and advocate for the homeless, Dan Bigras.

The untimely death of Sylvain Plourde was a great shock. This kind-hearted man was completely dedicated to his cause and respected by everyone.

He was a staunch supporter of the disadvantaged and the marginalized in our society. A tireless worker, Sylvain Plourde constantly called for organizations to be given the support required to meet needs stemming from growing poverty.

He carried out his work with boundless enthusiasm and he will be deeply missed.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I wish to offer my sincere condolences to the family, friends and relatives of this extraordinary man.

Thank you, Sylvain, and farewell.

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[English]

**LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's cattle producers have been going through some difficult times. With prices for feed rising and prices for beef falling, Canadian producers need every market they can find for Canadian cattle.

Improved market access is one of the tools that will raise the value of Canadian cattle. This is why it is good news that yesterday the government of Mexico announced that it will now allow the import of Canadian breeding cattle. This new access is in addition to current access already permitted for Canadian beef and beef products.

This government will continue to work for full market access for all Canadian beef products with all of our trading partners. Working hard to expand our beef exports is one way this government continues to put farmers first.

Canadian beef and cattle producers are second to none in the world. This government and this member are proud to work with them and for them.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**TEMISKAMING HOSPITAL CAT SCAN FOUNDATION**

**Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Temiskaming Hospital CAT Scan Foundation for reaching its fundraising goal of \$2.3 million.

Collecting this amount of money in small rural northern Ontario towns is no easy task.

[English]

This remarkable achievement can be largely attributed to the tireless efforts of countless volunteers and communities working together toward a common goal.

*Statements by Members*

An anonymous donation of nearly \$50,000 from a former New Liskeard resident earlier this month ultimately ensured the initiative's success.

The Temiskaming Hospital performed its first CAT scan on January 9, 2006. Since then, over 5,000 scans have been performed as a result of the CT scanner.

Once again, I express congratulations to foundation chairman George Kemp, his fellow foundation members and the various donors who contributed to this very worthwhile cause, thus ensuring that the people of Temiskaming Shores and surrounding area are well served by the CT scanner.

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**CANADIAN WOMEN AND COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS**

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for many years Industry Canada has been proud to support the Canadian Women and Communications Program. CWC's mission is to help women advance in the field of communications.

Tonight CWC will hold its annual awards gala. Award winners for 2008 are: Golden West Broadcasting Ltd., for demonstrating outstanding leadership in its promotion of women; Amélie Poulin, Bell Canada, for helping to build CWC; Julia Elvidge, Chipworks Inc., as Trailblazer of the Year; Mentor of the Year, Pat Solman, MTS Allstream Inc.; and Woman of the Year, Ruth Kelly, president and publisher, Venture Publishing.

I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating the many outstanding Canadian women in communications.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last Saturday morning my constituents in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek awoke to a news story in the *Hamilton Spectator*, which announced that there would not be a full environmental assessment of Liberty Energy's plan to build and operate a power producing sludge, sewage and incinerator in East Hamilton. Environmentalists say that the potential exists for the plant to double Hamilton's level of cancer-causing dioxins and significantly increase other airborne toxins.

My constituents are worried. Citizens and environmentalists across Hamilton are also concerned that this plant would not only burn Hamilton's sludge, but we would see sludge-laden trucks on Hamilton's streets from Toronto and other areas.

Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has already had one debacle relative to incineration, namely the SWARU incinerator. Our citizens do not want a potential repeat with similar risk to our community as those which spewed from that high risk facility for years.

Hamilton city council unanimously called for a full environmental assessment. Local MPPs Andrea Horwath and Paul Miller have called for a full environmental assessment. Today I am joining the Hamilton city council, local MPPs—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Nunavut.

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government recently transferred 1,900 metric tons of offshore turbot quota in NAFO division 0B to non-Nunavut interests.

Violating Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, section 15, which explicitly obliges the government to seek advice in a timely manner from the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board on Inuit harvesting rights and opportunities in offshore and marine areas, the offshore turbot quota was given to southern fishing companies, without due process.

Why is Nunavut at only 27% of the total allowable catch of the commercial turbot quota in the marine area adjacent to Baffin Island? This violates the principle of adjacency. This unfair practice must end.

Atlantic provinces receive 80% to 95% of their quota in their adjacent waters. Atlantic fishermen would not tolerate their quota going to outside interests. Why should we? It is time that Nunavut fishers be treated fairly in our adjacent waters.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**29TH OLYMPIC GAMES**

**Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Olympic Games to be held in China next summer are causing such a stir among Beijingers that tickets, especially to aquatic events, are being sold hot off the presses. This strong desire to encourage their fellow citizens and discover the world is highly commendable and desirable.

Nonetheless, on the flip side, the parents of Quebec and Canadian athletes, such as the mother of swimmer Marie-Pier Boudreau-Gagnon, are a few months away from the competition with flight and hotel booked, but no place to sit in the stands to cheer for their child.

Obviously this situation is cause for concern for the parents and also for the athletes. This is far from ideal preparation conditions. I have already notified the Chinese authorities about this problem and, like us, they are looking for solutions. Does the government intend to step up and do everything in its power to ensure that everyone can fully enjoy their Olympic experience?

\* \* \*

[English]

**BRADLEY DAVIS**

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the memory of Bradley Davis, counsellor and friend, who died last month after a battle with cancer.

Bradley served as a strategist in the office of the leader of the official opposition in 2007. He also worked for me from the time I entered federal politics. He was a brilliant young lawyer whose wisdom and judgment never failed me.

He was so young when he died, barely 34 years old. It just breaks our hearts. We who remain behind feel bereft at his loss.

Yet we rejoice in his life. We remember his wild and ironic laugh, the ferocious determination he brought to all causes, his passionate love of family, friends and country. We remember his intellectual clarity, his moral courage, his devotion to the public good.

We offer to his parents, Herb and Sandi, to his wife, Alyssa, and their two young children, our undying affection and support. We will never forget Brad Davis.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

### FINANCE

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance upheld a long tradition with a twist. He picked up a pair of resoled shoes rather than the traditional new footwear finance ministers wear for the budget. The minister said, “It suits this budget. It’s a budget that is prudent”.

Not to be outdone, opposition parties are jumping on the bandwagon with footwear reflecting their financial policies. The NDP shoes reveal how an NDP budget would drive Canada’s economy. It is a real collector’s item, a sixties style of loafers. The Bloc finance critic could not find shoes that said “irrelevant”, thus the decision to go barefoot.

To decide on proper footwear for the member for Markham—Unionville, the Liberals held an emergency caucus. After hours deliberating, no consensus was reached. According to an insider, the opposition leader, who some say is not a leader, surprised his caucus with a decision.

Not caring about going way over budget, he presented his finance critic with an appropriate choice for the Liberal Party: an overpriced, diamond studded, Liberal red pair of flip-flops.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, climate change is the worst ecological threat humanity is facing. Canada must do its best to fight it, but the government has done bad. Its so-called plan is so weak that it will not even meet its weak targets.

If the Prime Minister is serious about cooperation, why will he not bring back Bill C-30, the clean air and climate change act, which he shamefully killed last fall?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government has established a clear target for the reduction of greenhouse gases. It is 20% from now until 2020. This

### Oral Questions

is in fact one of the most ambitious forward looking targets in the world.

The plans that the Minister of the Environment is developing will meet those targets.

[Translation]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what do the Pembina Institute, the Tyndall Centre, the C.D. Howe Institute, the National Energy Board, the Deutsche Bank, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy and Al Gore have in common? They have all criticized the government’s plan as much too weak.

I would like the Prime Minister to show us a single study that applauds the weak plan he is proposing to Canadians.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government has set clear targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: 20% by 2020. We fully intend to meet those targets.

The Leader of the Opposition and his party adopted this plan when the throne speech was given last fall.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is not an answer. The Prime Minister cannot name a single study because there are no studies. All the experts who have looked at his plan have noted its weaknesses, which are so huge that polluters will not pay, but will be paid. According to the Tyndall Centre, “oil companies could end up with a windfall of \$400 million worth of easy credits”.

This plan is not worthy of Canada. What will it take for the Prime Minister to understand that?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during the decade when the Leader of the Opposition was in government, he failed to present an effective plan to meet the targets he mentioned. In 10 years he did not implement a single plan.

We will implement a detailed plan that will enable us to meet our targets and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020.

\* \* \*

[English]

### ATOMIC ENERGY OF CANADA LIMITED

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, over two months ago, the Minister of Natural Resources said that there would be “full accountability for all the players” in the Chalk River crisis. The Prime Minister said, “the government will assure accountability is appropriately restored”.

The head of AECL has long since left. The top nuclear official at Chalk River has stepped down.

Will the Prime Minister explain why accountability stops at the AECL, but never seems to include his own government, not even a minister who does not bother to check his email?

*Oral Questions*

• (1420)

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are full of conspiracy theories. Each day they come back with a new theory, when in reality they do not know what they stand for. They criticize the government for not engaging soon enough. Then they say that we should not have been engaged and that we should not have responded.

One day the Liberals say that they support Bill C-38, after they have had ample opportunity to examine all the witnesses. Then they change their minds the next day. Now they are starting to criticize people from various agencies.

The government respects all employees at the CNSC and AECL for their hard work. We will continue to stand behind them for getting the job done.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, now that the imminent crisis in Chalk River is over, now that the government has compromised the regulator's independence—and then fired her—can the government finally clarify its intentions for Atomic Energy of Canada?

Will it uphold Canada's internationally renowned leadership in this field or is it going to sell to the highest bidder?

[English]

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again the Liberal Party needs to give up on all the conspiracy theories. We launched a review late last year, in the fall of last year.

We are collecting all the information on AECL. We did that very publicly, very proactively. We are getting the best information we can. When we have collected all of that information, this government will make a decision in the best interests of the Canadian people, taxpayers and the future of AECL.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, with respect to the greenhouse gas emissions reduction measures introduced by British Columbia, the Minister of the Environment said, and I quote, "What works in British Columbia may not necessarily work in Nova Scotia". The environment minister's statement confirms the need for a territorial approach.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that in order to be consistent with what his Minister of the Environment is saying, he must implement binding, absolute targets to reduce greenhouse gases, with 1990 as the reference year, and use the territorial approach as a framework?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week I spoke with the Premier of British Columbia and I noted his plan for reducing greenhouse gases. We agreed that our two plans complement each other. His plan controls consumer emissions while ours controls emissions by major polluters. We are prepared to work with British Columbia and all the other provinces to reduce greenhouse gases.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, with the territorial approach, Quebec and the provinces would decide how to achieve the binding, absolute targets that the federal government must implement. That approach has been very successful in Europe.

Will the Prime Minister finally take responsibility on the environment file and implement binding, absolute greenhouse gas reduction targets with the territorial approach as a framework?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the environment is a jurisdiction shared between the federal government and the provinces. We are prepared to work with the provinces on reducing greenhouse gases. It is indeed a territorial approach in many regards. We are seeking to harmonize the rules with the provinces.

We have established national targets. I am clear and we are clear on the fact that these targets are the minimum for each province and territory.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, between 1990 and 2005, the Quebec manufacturing industry cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, while the emissions in the fossil fuel industry, concentrated primarily in Alberta, increased by nearly 50%. But Alberta benefits from the Conservatives' plan, at the expense of Quebec.

When will the Prime Minister understand that in order to be fair to Quebec and its industry, we need to establish absolute reduction targets and set 1990 as the reference year? Will he abandon the polluter-paid principle for the polluter-pay principle?

• (1425)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that the Bloc critic is telling us that our targets are too tough or that they go too far. Our international plan would regulate large companies. These reductions are binding and absolute. We must reduce greenhouse gases. In the 18 years that the Bloc has been in the House of Commons, nothing has been done on the national level. Now, we are taking action.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, setting the economy against the environment, as the Conservatives are doing, is totally outdated. The Prime Minister needs to understand that Kyoto creates business opportunities and improves the environment at the same time.

Will the Prime Minister abandon his polluter-paid approach, bring in binding, absolute targets and set 1990 as the reference year so that the carbon exchange in Montreal can finally get off the ground?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our plan of course includes a carbon exchange. We are working out the details. We need to have national figures for reducing greenhouse gases. We can see that since the creation of the Bloc, 18 years ago, this has never been done here in the House of Commons in Ottawa. Our government is taking action. When it comes to greenhouse gas reductions, we will get real results for all regions and all Canadians and for the world.



[English]

### EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP has advocated for an increased awareness of Canada's emergency preparedness and we have also called for more transparency when it comes to military affairs.

Now we learn that the Canadian armed forces signed an agreement with the United States allowing for interoperability of troops during civil emergencies, but no one told Canadians.

Why is the Conservative government being so secretive about this agreement? What does it have to hide?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is actually the formalization of a long-standing agreement that has been in place. Basically, it allows for a formal agreement permitting armed forces from either side of the border to render assistance in a time of a civil emergency.

This is all about ensuring safety on both sides of the border, allowing for mutual cooperation to the benefit of the citizens of both Canada and the United States.

It sounds to me as if those tinfoil hats are getting a little tight down there.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister still has not explained why this agreement was kept secret and even if he was aware of it. How can the Conservatives be trusted when they keep the truth from Canadians?

In the event of a civil emergency and the agreement is invoked, what process is to be followed to approve the deployment of Canadian troops to the U.S. and under whose command would Canadians operate?

Conversely, who would authorize American deployment to Canada and under whose chain of command would the Americans operate while in Canada? Why does the minister not answer that question?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it could not have been very secret if the hon. member found out.

As it would apply at Norad or NATO, but most important, any activities that were to take place on Canadian soil would be done under the control of Canadian officials, the Canadian military most particularly.

Why have we done this? To exceed and expand upon the necessary actions that occur when people are in jeopardy. If there are ships at sea in distress, if there is an emergency involving, for example, an avalanche, this is all about facilitating the saving of lives.

We would think that a member from British Columbia would understand that.

### Oral Questions

#### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

**Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** First, Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government killed the court challenges program. Then, it went to court to fight groups who only wanted to protect their minority language rights.

Now, it is going where no other government has gone before. It wants these groups to pay the government its costs, which has never been done before.

The courts do not award these types of costs in public interest litigations. What has the government got against minority language rights?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his legal advice and how we should conduct litigation, but as I indicated yesterday, this matter is presently before the court and we should let the court do its work.

● (1430)

[Translation]

**Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in April 2006 in New York, the Prime Minister called the court challenges program a very valuable program. Four months later, he scrapped it.

Why does the Prime Minister claim to defend linguistic minorities when he is outside the country, but scorn those very communities when he is here at home?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has made a firm commitment to official language minority communities, and to the promotion of both official languages in Canada.

The court challenges program is currently before the courts. Thus, it would be inappropriate to comment on this matter.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I can suggest a solution to the government: since it was the government that created the problem, it could simply drop the court fight and reinstate the program.

This government has the power, right here and now, and at a minimal cost, to restore the court challenges program. Over the years, that program has had a very positive impact on a number of minority groups and there are many examples of its usefulness. Despite that fact, the government continues to ignore the most fundamental of Canadian rights.

Will the minister get his head out of the sand and commit, once and for all, to restoring the court challenges program, out of respect for all citizens of this country?

[English]

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, our government, during the Speech from the Throne, committed to official language communities across Canada.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

We talked about the next action plan and we are working hard to deliver the goods. Since the court challenges program is currently before the courts, we cannot comment on it.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to prove it once and for all, by getting the court challenges program out of the courts and restoring it immediately.

The government's obligation to take action to promote the growth and development of official language minority communities is enshrined in the law. Since its creation, the court challenges program has made it possible for minority communities in all provinces to fund their legal battles in order to assert their rights.

Can the minister tell us why a program that protects our minorities would be so harmful for Canada and minority communities?

[English]

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague insults French and English language minority communities because he bases the health of these communities upon one single program. We delivered \$30 million for the promotion of official language minority communities and we are committed to the action plan.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**NUCLEAR ENERGY**

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives fired Linda Keen for her supposed lack of judgment in the Chalk River affair. We have learned that, after her departure, the new president reintroduced the pre-assessment of new Candu reactors, which Ms. Keen had set aside due to a lack of financial and human resources required to respect the rigorous safety standards.

Does this not prove that the Conservatives got rid of the obstacle to developing a nuclear network and without providing any real justification?

[English]

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the only thing this suggests is that the member is also engaged in these conspiracy theories. There is nothing that is further from the truth. Obviously, I cannot comment with respect to the former head of CNSC. That is a matter before the courts.

As far as any dealings which are completely within its control and matters that are dealt with by the CNSC in consultation with AECL, the government has no input into that at all.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister does not seem to have understood the question.

Health and safety must be the priorities of the commission headed by Ms. Keen. Reintroducing the pre-assessment of Candu reactors, highly desired by the Conservatives, casts doubt on respect for nuclear safety standards.

What is the real reason for this decision if not the quick establishment of new plants in Canada? Why jeopardize the safety of our citizens for commercial interests?

• (1435)

[English]

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what the government did in looking at the health and safety of Canadians.

When we acted in December, we ensured that we were going to restore the supply of medical isotopes so that the safety and health of Canadians could be taken first. We did this with the support of every single member in the House. Now they want to change their minds. Shame on them.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**KOSOVO**

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when I asked the minister's secretary of state a question about Kosovo, she replied that the government was "assessing the situation". However, Kosovo's independence has now been recognized by a number of countries, including several European countries and the United States.

What does the government intend to do? Several countries have already reacted; they have already assessed the situation. What is the government waiting for to recognize Kosovo's independence?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the secretary of state said, we are assessing the situation. What does that mean? Simply put, it means that we are in touch with the international community, we are discussing the situation with our allies, we are watching to see how the situation evolves on the ground. We will inform the House of our position in due course.

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, everyone agrees that each case is unique, but there is a universal principle in place: every nation's fundamental right to self-determination, as recognized by the UN charter.

Why is the government hesitating to recognize the efforts of the people of Kosovo, a nation that is taking control of its own destiny?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Kosovo case is unprecedented, and it calls for an unprecedented approach. I do not think that we can look to the legal record to assess what is happening in Kosovo or in other international cases. That is why we are conducting an in-depth assessment of the situation, and we will inform the House of our position in due course.

[English]

### COPYRIGHT ACT

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week the industry minister unveiled yet another Conservative Party attack ad. This Republican-style negative attack ad not only failed to tell Canadians the truth, it even broke Canada's copyright laws. The industry minister is allowing his party to break the same Copyright Act for which he himself is responsible.

Why will the minister not stand and simply demand that the Conservative Party obey the law?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome my hon. friend lately to the law of copyright. I wish him well.

In fairness, he must admit that the song *For the Love of Money* does bring to mind the Liberal Party. That is the party of big spending, with spending proposals of \$98 billion over four years. That is the party of deficits and it is proposing a deficit to Canadians of \$62 billion. It is a loud group, but it is also not the party of answers, because it does not have an explanation of where the money is going to come from.

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, so much for accountability.

The best defence that the industry minister has come up with is that the negative attack ad was not really an ad. By failing to get permission before releasing the attack ad, the Conservative Party broke the law. Is this simply another case of the Conservative Party believing that it operates above Canadian law?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the thing about budget time is that it always brings out the very worst in the Liberals. There is the party of big spending. It is inexplicable, but it has been said before in this House:

—the spenders in the Liberal government are revving up their engines again. Nothing starts a feeding frenzy more than the smell of cash around Liberal backbenchers.

**An hon. member:** Who said that?

**Hon. Jim Prentice:** The member for Kings—Hants.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. That question is finished. We are on to the next one.

The hon. member for Kitchener Centre has the floor now. We will have some order, please.

\* \* \*

### THE ECONOMY

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government continues to set new standards for dishonest communications. Just last week the Minister of Industry embarrassed himself with bizarre economics and incoherent math and these were backed up with false and misleading quotes.

The minister tried to rewrite the history of deficits in this country, the kind the Conservatives create and the Liberals have to clean up.

### Oral Questions

Does the minister recall the multi-billion dollar deficit left to Canada by his political hero Brian Mulroney?

• (1440)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry presented a booklet of I think 65 pages of Liberal spending that would lead us millions and millions of dollars into debt, \$62 billion in debt, I think, and of course those members called that documentation of Liberal promises a book of lies. That is what they call their promises. It is not what we call their promises.

But when they complain about copyright violations, there is one thing that we all know. When it comes to overspending, high taxes, debt and deficit, the Liberal Party owns that copyright.

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I notice that the Conservatives did not send out their Minister of Finance to frighten Canadians with this talk of deficits. People remember his deficits from when he was the treasurer of Ontario.

That is why Canadians simply cannot trust this government. They will look us right in the eye, these Conservatives, and they will tell us things that they know are not true. Why should Canadians trust this government when it deliberately manufactures false numbers simply to mislead and deceive Canadians?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think those members need a new research department over there in the Liberal Party.

I believe my friend was a resident of Ontario at those times. Apparently she was not paying too much attention to the financial affairs of the province. Not surprisingly, the Liberals do not care about that.

The Minister of Finance, when he was minister in Ontario, ran a balanced budget with a surplus every single year, the same as he has done here in Ottawa, and the exact same thing that we will see here today: a prudent, balanced Conservative budget.

\* \* \*

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are media reports that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control is delaying the release of a report on Great Lakes pollution and health implications for Canadian and American citizens.

Could the Minister of the Environment tell the House if he has taken any action to get the report released?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me thank the member for his commitment to the quality of the Great Lakes. We think this important scientific report should be made available to all Canadians. It should be made available so that we can continue our work to clean up the Great Lakes.

*Oral Questions*

We have been in contact with the U.S. government and have asked it to immediately release this report. We think it is the right thing to do. We are finally acting on getting the Great Lakes cleaned up, something that for 13 long years never happened under the previous government.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has relied on Ontario to be the economic engine of our country, but reckless tax cuts from the government for the oil and gas sector are driving up our dollar.

With forestry being hit hard in the north and the manufacturing sector in crisis, hundreds of thousands of hard-working Ontarians are losing their jobs. Wal-Mart McJobs are no substitute. For how much longer will the Conservative government turn its back on Canada's largest province?

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, certainly we are very concerned. This government is terribly concerned with the loss of jobs in any community. We hate to see any province that appears to be disadvantaged.

However, we would encourage Ontario to step forward and take the advantage that has been offered to it in the \$33 billion in infrastructure that was offered all across this country. Most of the provinces have signed on to that agreement. That would help all of the constituents in Ontario.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, privatizing our public infrastructure is not the way to go.

Ontario is on the verge of being a have not province. Over and over, Ontario is ignored or even hurt by Conservative economics. Ontarians get \$5,000 less in employment insurance than those in other provinces. There is no strategy to buy Ontario-made products. Ontario's cultural sector is forced to beg for resources. When will the Conservative government start treating Ontario families with some respect?

• (1445)

**Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have to correct the member. She is absolutely wrong when she talks about employment insurance. The fact is, according to Statistics Canada, not political spinners, 75% of people in Ontario who pay into employment insurance are eligible for benefits.

I can tell the member that it is absolutely no answer to ensure that people get more benefits by remaining unemployed for longer. We are not going to go there. We are making sure that the people of Ontario have training so they can step into that red hot job market. We are acting.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Brenda Martin, an innocent Canadian, has been languishing in a Mexican prison for two years. The Secretary of

State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade recently made a quick trip to Mexico, where she apparently met with those responsible for this matter. However, the minister confirmed that she was unable to visit Brenda, but that she did have the time to meet with Canadian expatriates at a reception in Guadalajara, located just 20 minutes from the prison.

Could the minister explain how she found time to attend the social gathering but could not make time to visit this innocent individual, Brenda Martin?

[English]

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pretty much everything that the member said with respect to Ms. Martin's case is wrong, so let us be clear. I have worked very hard, as has this government, on behalf of Ms. Martin.

There are 13 Canadians in Mexican prisons, so when I was in Mexico meeting with its foreign minister, its human rights commissioner and its attorney general, there were other cases that had to be talked about, because each and every Canadian is just as important to us as the next one. The hon. member might want to consider that.

Also, if I could point this out to him, with respect to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and in accordance with international practice, Canada cannot intervene in the justice system of another country. Those are his words.

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's ineptitude on this case is such that she has been reduced to scurrying out of Canadian Tire stores to avoid TV cameras tracking her down for a long requested interview.

Why is the minister unable to provide Brenda Martin with any concrete information on her supposedly high-level efforts to gain her freedom? Why is the minister refusing to take Brenda's phone calls? Why did the minister abandon Brenda Martin for some consulate canapés and Perrier when she was just a few minutes away and could have gone over there?

Why is she not standing up for innocent Canadians? Why the ineptitude on that side of the House?

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are really growing tired of that member's ambulance-chasing tactics. He stood in my shoes and he knows exactly what I can and cannot say with specific details of cases and what has been done for a constituent. It is the privacy law. He has been quoted saying it himself many times.

With respect to Ms. Martin, we have worked very hard and we will continue, because she is a very important Canadian to us. I can tell the hon. member that I did of course speak with the foreign minister, the attorney general and a total of 16 senior officials in discussing her case and those of the other 13 Canadians in Mexico.

### STATUS OF WOMEN

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government refused to explain why it prohibits funding for women's groups that do advocacy work while it pays the Conference of Defence Associations \$500,000 for defence advocacy.

What does the government have against women's groups that advocate for equality? If the Conservatives believe in equality for all women, why not start by eliminating this double standard?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government supports practical projects that improve women's living conditions and promote equality for all Canadian women.

[English]

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the fact is that women's groups doing critical advocacy work to advance equality in this country have been cut off from federal government funding.

The government cut the court challenges program and also shut down the Law Commission in an effort to silence voices of dissent, but there is money for lobby groups that agree with the government. Canadian women would like to know why the government endorses such a shameful double standard.

• (1450)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that our government works on behalf of all Canadian women and not just for one group or another. All women across Canada have the right to be listened to and heard by this government.

\* \* \*

### TV5

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in response to a question I asked him about TV5, the Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage said that a meeting had been held between representatives of the partnering governments and that TV5 was an important tool in promoting the culture and values of international francophonie. We know that.

What we want to know is the Government of Canada's position on the situation. Will it let France alone determine the future of TV5?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the partnering governments of TV5 have highlighted the importance of TV5Monde in promoting the culture and values of international Francophonie and it must remain a Francophonie project.

Canada will continue its discussions in collaboration with all the partnering governments, including the Quebec government, in order to encourage consensus on this file.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Quebec has come out in favour of the survival and autonomy of TV5, as have

### Oral Questions

Switzerland and Belgium. What we need now is for Canada to take the same firm stand.

Has France been informed that Canada wants to maintain the multilateral nature of this important tool for la Francophonie?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer the question. It is quite simple. When I was in Paris, I met with my counterpart, Bernard Kouchner. We discussed the future of TV5, and I can assure my colleague that my French counterpart understood our position.

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[English]

### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the President of the Treasury Board failed to say that the Manitoba government is refusing to sign on to the second phase of the floodway expansion project because he reneged on a major commitment to Manitobans.

Last February, the minister promised Manitobans that \$170 million would come from a national fund and would not affect Manitoba's share of infrastructure funding. Now he says he cannot deliver on his promise. Manitobans have a right to know why they are being robbed of \$170 million by that minister and that promise-breaking Conservative government.

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that member did absolutely nothing when he was in power as a member of the Liberal government. He did absolutely nothing to get the money delivered for the floodway. It took the Minister of Transport in this government and the Prime Minister to deliver one-half of the money. Unfortunately, that member did nothing. It took this government to get the job done.

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### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Michelle Senayah, a young Canadian woman from Mississauga, Ontario—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Wajid Khan:** Mr. Speaker, whenever there is a question about a woman who is not well or injured, a Canadian abroad, those members do not want to listen. They do not care about Canadians who are affected abroad.

Michelle Senayah, a young Canadian woman from Mississauga, Ontario was involved in a very serious traffic accident last Thursday in Lomé, Togo. Ms. Senayah suffered severe injuries in the accident and there are concerns about the level of medical care available to her in Togo.

Could the Secretary of State tell the House if the government is doing anything to assist this young Canadian citizen?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, consular officials in Lomé, Ottawa, London and Africa have been working diligently to provide consular assistance to support Michelle Senayah and her family. Not only did consular officials ensure that the necessary medication was found in Togo, but they provided the much needed point of contact for all parties involved to get the medical evacuation, including trained physicians in Togo, medical facilities in the U.K., and the family.

Our thoughts are with this family at this very difficult time and we wish her a speedy recovery.

\* \* \*

● (1455)

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Sault Area Hospital emergency doctors group has given notice that they will withdraw their services April 1. They are no longer willing to accept substandard care for their patients. In addition, thousands of orphaned patients will have no access to primary care. This crisis is not unique to Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma.

Will the Minister of Health respect the integrity of the Canada Health Act by engaging with the Ontario minister of health, health care officials and doctors in my community to resolve this crisis?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a former member of a provincial parliament, the hon. member of all people knows that this is within the purview of the Ontario government.

As a result of budget 2007, we increased the amount of money to the Ontario government by over 6%, as a result of the budget that will be tabled today, as part of the 2004 health accord, at least another 6% in addition. We are giving those funds to the McGuinty government. It is time for the McGuinty government to get off the pot and do its job.

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**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the apology for residential school abuses is a necessary step toward reconciliation and is the foundation for a transformation in the relationship between governments and aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Drafting the apology behind closed doors is another example of the pattern of secrecy and shows why Canadians do not trust Conservatives. The government is risking rejection because of that flawed process.

Why will the Prime Minister not abide by the political accord signed in May 2005 and consult fully with the Assembly of First Nations on the drafting of an apology?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised in the last Speech from the Throne, which was passed in the House, that he is

going to make an apology. That is unprecedented. It was rejected by the Liberal Party. Previously it was not done.

We are proceeding not only with the apology which will be forthcoming, but we are also proceeding with the residential schools compensation package, something that was not done by the Liberal Party.

We continue to work closely with first nations as we put together not only the apology but also the truth and reconciliation commission. This is something whose time has come.

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**FORESTRY**

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Natural Resources aware that forest fire season in B.C. is weeks away and that hectares of pine beetle infested forests can go up like a tinder box? The lives of many British Columbians are at risk.

The minister lives in B.C. so he—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Is the member finished her question? I did not think so. It was very difficult to hear. We will have a little order. The Minister of Natural Resources has to be able to hear the question before he can answer.

The member for Vancouver Centre still has the floor.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Mr. Speaker, the minister lives in B.C., so he cannot be ignorant of the problem. No matter what he says, the minister's credibility is shot. He botched the AECL file. He has said nothing once more and has done nothing once more to prepare for a disastrous forest fire season.

Will he immediately take action, or is he content to ricochet from crisis to crisis?

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe there is any Liberal who has the nerve to stand up in the House and talk about forest fires, never mind AECL, after their government for 13 years did nothing with respect to forest fire management.

Our government has put more money into the mountain pine beetle initiative. That money is going to over 200 communities throughout British Columbia to target forest fire management.

We are getting the job done. The Liberal Party when in government ignored all of those problems for 13 years and did absolutely nothing. Now the Liberals have the gall to stand up and pretend they care.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL REVENUE**

**Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are nearly 25 million taxpayers in Canada and our government believes in accountability and fairness when it comes to the taxes they pay.

[English]

In May 2007 the government announced the creation of the taxpayer bill of rights. In addition to this bill of rights, could the Minister of National Revenue say if the government is taking other measures to ensure taxpayers will be treated fairly and with respect?

● (1500)

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during the last election, our party promised to bring in a taxpayer bill of rights and a taxpayers' ombudsman.

I am pleased to inform all Canadians that last Thursday in Winnipeg, I had the pleasure of announcing Mr. Paul Dubé as Canada's first Taxpayers' Ombudsman. The Taxpayers' Ombudsman office is now open and ready to receive inquiries from Canadians.

This is just another example of how this government is getting the job done for Canadians.

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**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister earlier refused to answer a question put to him by the Leader of the Opposition. Let me ask him again.

Can the government table one shred of evidence, any analysis to substantiate its fraudulent claims that it will achieve its weak climate change targets, or is the minister simply too busy killing light rail projects, interfering in municipal elections and putting out media fires linking him to a major bribery scandal?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can give the member a number of quotes. I can give quotes from Sheila Copps, from Christine Stewart and from David Anderson, who all said that the previous government did not do anything to fight global warming. I can quote the deputy leader of the member's own party who said that they did not get the job done.

The single person who has broken the biggest environmental promise in the history of Canada is not a member of the federal Liberal Party. It is the member's brother, Dalton McGuinty, who failed to close Ontario's four coal fired plants as he promised to do, another McGuinty broken promise.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**OMAR KHADR**

**Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the three opposition parties, with the support of Mr. Kuebler, Omar Khadr's lawyer, denounced the attitude of the Conservative government, which is neglecting its duty to protect this child soldier, who is being held in Guantanamo Bay. In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed and ratified

by Canada, the government must immediately demand that the United States send Omar Khadr back to Canada to be tried under Canadian law.

What is the Minister of Foreign Affairs waiting for to demand his return to Canada?

[English]

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know that Mr. Khadr has been in prison since 2002. Four of those years were under the previous Liberal government.

I have also assured the House on several occasions that Mr. Khadr is being treated humanely.

\* \* \*

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Brad Cathers, Minister of Health and Social Services for Yukon.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

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**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are two designations that I would like to make.

● (1505)

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 66, I would like to designate Wednesday, March 27, 2008, for the continuation of the debate on the motion to concur in the second report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[English]

I would also like to designate Friday, February 29, 2008 as an allotted day.

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**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**AFGHANISTAN**

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

**Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Charlottetown.

I rise today in support of a motion before this House to extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to 2011 and to redefine that mission as one of development, training and security.

*Government Orders*

I know every member of this House takes this matter with the greatest of seriousness. Calling upon the men and women of our armed forces to place themselves in harm's way thousands of miles from their families and communities is one of the most solemn acts that we as elected officials can undertake.

I am gratified by the civility with which this debate has so far been conducted. As others have noted, this matter is just too important to be used for partisan political gain. Canadians expect more than that from us and this week they are getting it.

This debate weighs the well-being of Canadians against the obligations we as citizens have to the world beyond our borders. Whenever I am faced with an issue such as this, I am drawn back to my own experience before I entered politics.

In the early 1990s, I served as the head of the Ontario Association of Foodbanks. I am sure many of us remember what dark days those were, especially for those at the lower end of the spectrum. Faced with the consequences of massive cuts to social programs by all three levels of government, the association presented the governments with an ultimatum. We announced that if these cuts were not reversed in the near future, we would close our food banks.

The allotted time passed and the cuts were not rescinded. That presented food banks with a dreadful dilemma, many members will remember. Our credibility rested on our following through with the threat of closing our food banks, but the fact remained that thousands of people in need depended on us, and those numbers were only growing. We quickly saw that we had no choice at all as food banks. There was only one side in this conflict, the side of those in need, and so we kept our food banks open and we kept up the fight for increased social spending, a struggle that continues today. However, I have never again put any cause, no matter how just, ahead of the welfare of the innocents.

When I look at the situation in Afghanistan, I am compelled to ask a very difficult question. If Canadian Forces withdrew in 2009, what would happen to the people of Afghanistan? What would happen to those in need? What would happen to the innocents?

I do not ask the question rhetorically. I have put it to dozens of people who know much more than I do about the situation on the ground in Kandahar. I put the question to a Canadian soldier from my riding who is currently stationed in Kandahar, literally encamped in a tent on a mountainside. He told me that if Canadian troops were to leave, the Afghans he sees and works with every day, people he has come to know as neighbours and sometimes friends, would, without question, be terminated.

I put the question to women's groups who told me that they have evidence the Taliban knows the identity and location of key women leaders in the Kandahar region. If Canada leaves and the Taliban regains a foothold, I am told that one of their first tasks will be to find these women, arrest them and perhaps kill them.

It is my view that we have no choice but to remain in Kandahar until 2011. Our troops will now serve in a new role and it is one that is as innovative and effective as Lester Pearson's approach to the Suez crisis a half century ago, but now Canadians will not be serving as peacekeepers. They will be serving as peace builders.

As Canadians, we hope the people of Afghanistan will be able to enjoy peace, justice and security, an open government based on accountability and the rule of law, an economy that offers honest and humane opportunities to provide for their families, and educational and social services that are available to all.

We are aware of the heavy price that some have paid to advance these goals. This is brought home by the bodies of the Canadian soldiers that we have all mourned together in this House. We join them and their families and friends in their sorrow and grief at lives lost, bodies broken and spirits shattered, but we must remember that the people of Afghanistan have suffered as well through the long years of violence, conflict and war.

Canada has led the combat fight for years and has had many successes, however, it is now time to realize our greater role as a nation. We are the catalyst for reconciliation of people and communities torn apart and, as such, we must now renew our pledge to work for peace and development. In this context, the Liberal Party's vision for Canada is one of moving forward to a long-lasting peace by respectfully acknowledging the need for our combative past.

This takes me to the question as to how Canada can best support reconstruction and development in Afghanistan, an area of expertise where Canada has enjoyed a virtual unchallenged legacy of success. Some have even branded us as Boy Scouts in the world, however, I believe this is a brand we can be proud of.

There are many Canadian NGOs and other organizations, and I have spoken with many of them, who are working to improve conditions in Afghanistan. We commend these organizations.

● (1510)

The Canadian government, through CIDA, is assisting Afghanistan's reconstruction but it must do more and it must be accountable and transparent in the way it does it. Afghanistan will require economic and other forms of support well into the future. Government reports have drawn our attention to the high cost of outfitting the Canadian Forces for continued counter-insurgency operations into the undetermined future. To be more effective in building peace, we believe that a significant shift in Canada's concentration of financial resources toward long term human development is essential and necessary.

We are aware of the difficulties experienced by development and humanitarian agencies about what they refer to as the militarization of aid in Afghanistan. I have seen this and I know that it happens. It is the close identification of military operations and basic assistance. Aid must be delivered without compromising internationally recognized principles of development and humanitarian assistance.



*Government Orders*

What will this changed mission look like? Our troops will work directly with the Afghan people. They will oversee the building of dams to irrigate valleys and, at the same time, help to train Afghan security forces so that when the water flows the land will be safe enough for cultivation. They will literally turn battlefields into farmers' fields.

Canada has an obligation not to abandon the people of Afghanistan. I read in the paper yesterday that someone said that the reason the Liberal Party was supporting this motion was because we did not want an election. That is not true of me and I would appreciate not being included in that kind of comment. It is also not true of many of the Liberals who are sitting here on this side. We believe we just cannot abandon the people of Afghanistan.

Today, all of us in the House acknowledge the grave responsibility that we have in making difficult decisions regarding reconciliation, diplomatic and development efforts for the future of our military forces in Afghanistan. We ask that the government consider a compromise for the good of Canada but, moreover, with the knowledge that the people of Afghanistan now have the chance for a lasting peace.

The men and the women of our military now have the opportunity to finish the work they have sacrificed so much for already. I have no doubt that if we in the House stand with them, our own troops will succeed.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the time my colleague has been in the House he has earned the reputation that he brought with him, but within the House he has earned a reputation as somebody who cares about and understands the common humanity that is this planet. I appreciate his point of view. I am very comfortable with the position that our party and the government have come to on this issue.

At this point in time, when we have troops abroad, it is important that we come to a consensus on how we go forward. I commend the leaders of both parties, the ministers and the leaders on our side who have been involved in that.

When we had to make the difficult decision on the extension of this mission a couple of years ago, one of the questions a number of us had concerned the implications for Canada's ability to assist in other parts of the world, notably, at that point in time, Darfur. My colleague has had more experience in Darfur than any other member of the House and almost any other Canadian. I want to ask him his answer to that question. With our extension in Afghanistan, does this mean that Canada will still have the ability to do good work in places like Darfur?

• (1515)

**Mr. Glen Pearson:** Mr. Speaker, my heart is in Darfur and my kids are from Darfur but my heart has also learned to be in Afghanistan as well.

Before we can consider going to places like Darfur and other parts that are so essential and need the Canadian presence, we must finish the job to which we have committed ourselves. It was passed by the House and we have a responsibility to respect that.

I know many of us are anxious for the Canadian government to get to Darfur and start to make a difference but we must never do it

at the expense of people to whom we have already committed ourselves.

Do we have the capacity to do it? I do not have the answer to that question, but I do know that we have the capacity to fulfill the commitments that we have made and I believe that we should do that.

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague opposite for the tender, the tone and the contributions that he has made to this debate, both publicly and behind the scenes.

My question is basically a supplemental with respect to Canada's ability to continue to contribute to missions in Afghanistan, in the Middle East and in other parts of the world. Would the member agree that, as part of the whole government approach, which is one on which we obviously have a consensus to move forward, one that we are advocating is the way in which Canada can make significant contributions in places like Afghanistan and in other parts of the world, there is a need, given the capacity, to augment the regular and reserve forces of the Canadian military, to give us that increased capacity to be purveyors of good, to be in a position, as we have been in the past, to work for stability, for peace and to provide the necessary protection for other things to flourish on the ground, the development and humanitarian aid work of which the hon. member is familiar?

Would he agree that the Canadian military play an integral part in Canada's ability to project those important Canadian values and principles abroad?

**Mr. Glen Pearson:** Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with that. I do think that the mission in Afghanistan has been full of successes but also some failures. I think the Manley panel pointed out those failures.

In order for what the minister spoke about to come to pass, we must begin to re-evaluate a 3D approach: defence, diplomacy and development, and do it in such a way that the Canadian Forces can work within a framework, that it can be accountable for and we can be responsible for.

I can tell the member, from being in Sudan, in conflicts in Guatemala, in Rwanda, Bangladesh and it goes on, that the need for the Canadian Forces to provide peace building would be absolutely essential and would help Canada's image in the world, especially in a place like Darfur.

However, we first must finish what we are doing in Afghanistan and also develop a better model from it.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, like the previous speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in this debate. I certainly supported the Liberal amendment that was tabled in the House. We are never sure of anything in the House but there seems to be a certain amount of general support. I am hopeful that the issue can be resolved around the wording of that particular motion and that we can go forward.

*Government Orders*

It is my submission that perhaps we should change the channel and continue the debate in a very frank, honest and transparent nature and talk about the future of NATO and the leadership that is presently exhibited at NATO.

We are in Afghanistan under the auspices of NATO. It is a coalition of 37 countries. It is a treaty alliance and it was an article 5 engagement. There is always this debate as to when the job will be done but when I listen to the debate and read the materials, it appears to me that this, on the part of NATO, is a long term commitment. We are dealing with a failed state with a failed generation. This has been going on for many years and we need to build the country from the ground up, which would include governance, infrastructure, economy, et cetera.

It is not a 2009, 2007-09 or 2011 issue. I submit that it is a much longer timeframe than that. When we look at NATO's involvement, NATO's main political objective was to work in cooperation with the United Nations and the European Union to support the Afghan transition authority to meet its responsibilities to provide security and order. I will not go into that strategy with the limited time available to me, but I will say that it had nine components which, I submit, were well thought out. If the strategy were successful everything would be fine.

I am troubled by what has taken place with NATO. This was clearly identified on page 38 of the Manley report, which states:

UN agency operations in Afghanistan have suffered from a lack of leadership, direction and effective coordination from UN headquarters in New York. The appointment of a high-level representative to lead and coordinate both the UN and NATO commitments in Afghanistan can help achieve more productive UN-NATO collaboration.

The whole chapter talks about the NATO situation.

Canada can act with other governments participating in Afghanistan to see that the special representative's mandate is fully and effectively exercised.

I would like to see a complete strategy from NATO. A very important high level meeting in Bucharest is coming up in April and I think that will be the time that NATO owes it to all member countries to be frank, honest and constructive as to exactly what the plan is, how the strategy is going, at what point it is in the deployment of the strategy and whether there is an exit strategy. I would suggest that the exit strategy would be a few years down the road.

I believe that should be very much part of the debate as to what exactly is going on with NATO. As we are aware, of the 37 countries, only 4 countries are in a combat role in Afghanistan: Canada, the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands, although there is all this talk about other countries, such as France, getting involved. Other countries are in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, such as Germany and a whole host of other countries, but, as the slang phrase would go, they are certainly out of harm's way.

● (1520)

When we read what goes on, up until today anyway, there appears to be an unwillingness by any of these countries to get more involved in the whole strategy approved by the 37 countries. That begs the question. Exactly how does NATO think it is will complete

and accomplish the strategy that it so ably set out to do when it only has the support of a few of its member countries?

Canada went in and has done a good job, and I certainly support the motion. We have to be respectful of our commitment, but this talk of, "stay until the job is done", is foolish. A NATO alliance commitment is there. We have to play our part and put our shoulder to the wheel as to the responsibilities of NATO, but there has to be an obligation, a responsibility and a commitment from other countries that are part of the alliance. I am not sure I see that.

I look forward to the communication coming from the government. Again, that was another point the Manley panel identified. A clear message in the report was that the communications from the government was not frank and not a true communication.

When I read the reports published by the Department of Foreign Affairs, it looks to me that they were been written by Aldous Huxley. Everything was great. Little girls were going to school. There was nothing to worry about and no one should be in any way concerned as to what was going in that country. This was clearly identified as wanting by the authors of the Manley report.

Canadians want answers. The answers have to be frank, clear, serious, honest and transparent as to the long term future of this mission. That is why I speak in support of the general direction of the motion, that in 2009 the nature of the engagement changes, that it be clearly terminated in the Kandahar province in 2011 and that it be clearly communicated to NATO. Why would it go and look for anyone else to be involved in the province if there were no clear message from Canada that it wants to be part of a natural rotation? As I said in my earlier remarks, I see this going on for several years. I do not see it ending in 2009 or in 2011 either.

I hope the level of the debate will be elevated. I hope the point I have made, in my limited time in the House this afternoon, regarding NATO is part of the debate as we go forward. I hope the leaders of the government when they go to the meeting, and we all know what happens before the meeting is what is important, that those positions, policies and aspirations are clearly communicated, and not in April when the people gather in Bucharest. . However, they have to be communicated right now. People need to know that Canada wants to see more leadership and direction coming from the alliance, which heretofore we have not seen.

I look for direction on this issue. Hopefully with leadership from the alliance, people in Afghanistan can benefit and in the future the country can become a prosperous one like many other countries in the world.

● (1525)

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague touched on a number of points. He talked about the need to raise the level of debate.

*Government Orders*

Yesterday I was troubled by the comments from the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. He suggested that for some reason the New Democratic Party was not fit to govern. He said that it had a consistent position on Afghanistan over the last two years, calling for the removal of our troops from a combat role in Afghanistan, fully supported by a convention at which 90% of the delegates voted for the motion.

In a democracy the New Democratic Party has followed a pattern of achieving support from its constituency, representing the opinion of about 50% of Canadians on this mission. We have portrayed a consistent opinion over the past two years in the face of relentless name calling and diatribes from government members and from the opposition members to some degree.

How does the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore have the nerve to say that we are not fit to govern, when his party has changed its policy three times in the last two years on this very thing? Now for the very crass political purpose of avoiding an election, the Liberals have made a deal with the government. How does he stand with kind of behaviour in the House by his own leader?

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** Mr. Speaker, first, I am not the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. I am the member for Charlottetown.

I make the point that the level of debate should be raised. Those who want to limit the mission should not be accused of being Taliban supporters. Those who want to continue the mission should not be accused of being warmongers.

This debate has to occur. I support the debate. I support the ability of the member's party to have the position. I do not agree with it. I debated it for 10 minutes. My position is we are part of the alliance. We have committed ourselves to be there at least until February 2009. To go forward now in Parliament and suggest that we should leave in February 2008, in my opinion, is wrong. That would be doing the very thing that I am suggesting some other countries are doing. We would be showing a total lack of commitment to the alliance and our world reputation would suffer greatly.

Again, we are part of the alliance. We have to work within the alliance. I am a strong supporter of NATO, but I am troubled by the lack of leadership on this initiative.

• (1530)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that the NATO question is valid and should be debated, but it is probably beyond the scope of the debate in the House.

I would point out a couple of things. The member is right about the load being carried by mostly four countries. However, other countries are involved as well, and there should be more. Romania, Estonia, Australia, Denmark and soon to be added Poland are also contributing to the combat mission. Certainly more needs to be done.

Could my hon. colleague comment on the leadership role that Canada plays in operations such as this, which in my view are much greater from a leadership perspective than simply 2,500 divided by approximately 50,000 troops?

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** Mr. Speaker, I will respond briefly by challenging the premise of the question, that the debate and NATO is

beyond the scope of the House. I would disagree with that. If the debate does not take place in this House, where will it take place? Will it be down the street or somewhere else?

It has to take place here. This is the House of Commons. This is where the debate has to take place. NATO, through the Government of Canada to the Canadian people, owes the Canadian people an explanation as to the strategy. How it is getting along with the strategy? How it is intending to accomplish the strategy and the end game? So far I have not seen that.

I agree with the paragraph from the Manley report that we have seen a total lack of leadership from NATO on this initiative.

I really think the debate should be had in this House. I would urge other members to talk about NATO. I would urge the government of the day to be very aggressive, not start in April but start today, February 26, on the whole issue of—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. the parliamentary secretary on a point of order.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### CANADIAN HERITAGE

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, the motion to concur in the fourth report, extension of time to consider Bill C-237, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act (reduction of violence in television broadcasts), of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be deemed concurred in.

[*Translation*]

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

### AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the member for Trinity—Spadina.

Today, debate in the House has focused on the war in Afghanistan. I want to talk specifically about the NDP amendment. I am very proud of our political party's position.

I remember that back when everything started in 2003, important discussions took place here in the House. At the time, Canada had decided to go to Afghanistan, but the goal was to provide humanitarian aid and help the Afghan people. Sadly, in 2005, the Liberal government decided to go forward with a combat mission.

Our colleagues here in the House have said that because we are members of the UN, which agreed to the mission and handed it over to NATO, we have to help each other. However, there are more than four countries in the UN. Today, Holland, Canada, the United States and England are taking part in the combat mission, but other countries are not. There are several reasons for that.

Some countries have problems: governments are no longer listening to the people. For example, last year I was in Germany, and members of the German parliament told us that 80% of Germans were against the combat mission in Afghanistan. Despite their opposition, the Germans were in Afghanistan, but not in the combat zone. In Canada, most Canadians have made it clear that they feel the same way.

The Conservative government is playing word games and trying to convince people that if they do not support the mission, that means they do not support our soldiers. Imagine that. The government is trying to make our soldiers, as well as Canadians, believe that not supporting the mission means not supporting the soldiers. George W. Bush pulled the same stunt with Americans when he said, "You're with me or you're not with me".

• (1535)

It is important to understand that the government and the Parliament of Canada have the right to decide on the details of the mission. I think Canadians understand that.

Our soldiers are people who decided to join the Canadian Forces, whether it be the army, the air force or the navy. When their country, Canada, gives them a mission, they do it without question and they support it.

It is our responsibility, as leaders of our country, to give our soldiers that mission. It is clear that the combat mission in Afghanistan is not working. It is recognized that violence has increased and that Afghan women are still victims of violence. It is also recognized that the education system is not working as they would have us believe.

Even though we are talking about defending a country for democracy, I have difficulty understanding and accepting that a female member of the Afghan parliament, who wanted to express herself democratically, was thrown out of parliament by the government of Afghanistan. She lost her position as a member of parliament because she wanted to express herself democratically.

Today, we are defending a government that accepts drugs and the violence that is still being done to women. If the Canadian

government really wants to help people, it could have sent money to the African countries grappling with AIDS, for example. The money spent on fighting and waging war could have saved many more lives and prevented what is happening in Afghanistan.

In any dispute, a negotiated settlement becomes necessary. We would accomplish more by engaging in diplomacy and working and negotiating with these people than by waging war.

We saw what happened to the Russians. They went into Afghanistan, they fought and fought, and they left, but today the situation is still the same. I believe they missed the boat, but we must not miss the boat. We should be able to succeed through peace missions.

For their part, the Liberals did an about-face and came to tell us that they did not do it for political reasons or because of the prospect of an election. Do they think that Canadians are that easily fooled? Do you think that people were not aware of the negotiating that went on?

The Liberal Party is divided in two. It is scared of a vote that could trigger an election. Everyone can see what happened. Now they would have us think that they really believe in continuing the mission through 2011. But a few months ago, the Liberal leader said that it would end in 2009 and that we would leave Afghanistan. He was saying the same thing just a few weeks ago, as my colleague stated. The Liberals said that we must withdraw because they did not at all believe in this combat mission.

But now, all of a sudden, they are scared of losing the election, so they are joining up with the Conservatives. But they are not really joining up with the Conservatives, since I think it is the Conservatives who are joining the Liberals' team. The Liberals are the ones who led us into a combat mission in August 2005, under the member for LaSalle—Émard, the leader of the Liberal Party at the time. The Liberals forced this combat mission on us, and later they have tried to make us believe they had nothing to do with it. The Conservatives liked this, because at the time, they were the official opposition and wanted to engage in a combat mission to support George Bush and his administration. That was the situation. Then, they were happy to say that they would keep it going.

The Conservatives then got a little scared, because for a number of weeks the Liberals did not rise in the House of Commons and even, as we say in the unions, staged a walkout; they left the House.

• (1540)

At one point, I wondered if someone should dock their pay because they were no longer doing their jobs. They refuse to stand up to vote on important issues, because they are afraid of losing elections. The NDP, on the other hand, is not here to see whether we will win or lose elections; we are here to vote for what Canadians want, and what they want is a peacekeeping mission.

Now even the Bloc Québécois agrees with us and wants a peacekeeping mission. In the past, the Bloc Québécois voted with us to end the combat mission in 2009, only to later change its stance. Indeed, after Parliament reached a decision, the Bloc decided that it was over, that it would no longer argue the issue and it would respect the voice of Parliament. That is what it did.

*Government Orders*

The House of Commons must now reach a decision on extending the mission to 2011. I fear that the Bloc Québécois, following a majority vote in favour of this motion by the Conservative government supported by the Liberals, will sit down and say that, since Parliament has spoken, there is no point in trying to convince people that this is definitely not a good mission.

This is why we will vote against prolonging the war in Afghanistan. At the very least, the combat mission must end and Canada must assume its proper role as a peacekeeper. That is what we are most appreciated for around the world. In doing so, Canada will be able to take its place in the world.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in World War I and World War II, there were predecessor parties and movements to the NDP. Those folks were as reckless and naive as their modern counterparts in assuming that aid workers wearing peace buttons and handing out flowers would make all the problems go away. Historically, these World War II appeasers are mere afterthoughts to our brave soldiers at war. After 9/11 though, the positions of parties like the NDP and BQ are not just comical, they are hypocritical.

I notice the NDP's amendment makes no mention of the rights of women, and I do not think this is a coincidence or an oversight. The NDP gave up any claim to the rights of women when it sided with the reactionary peaceniks at the expense of Afghan women and children who need our support and protection. The NDP gave up crowing for human rights when it embraced a wilful isolationism that would return women in Afghanistan to executions in soccer stadiums.

Too many people in this House assume that the Taliban are a ragtag band of primeval warriors. It is easy to think that because their values are so primitive. However, Brigadier General Atkinson answered thoughtfully and echoed many comments by General Hillier recently. He stated that when there is a story printed in the *Ottawa Citizen* today, no matter what it is, it is being read. We should all ponder that statement when we debate in the House of Commons.

While I certainly understand that the modern media and communications have made—

• (1545)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member could perhaps ask her question at this moment.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, why is the member for Acadie—Bathurst purposely making statements that will endanger the lives of our soldiers in Afghanistan?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, from 1939 to 1945, our country fought to have democracy and to have the right to speak. That is the right that our veterans gave us, and I thank them for that. Nobody will take that away from us.

If we want to talk about support for our soldiers, what did we do for our World War II veterans of 1939 to 1945, whom the member was talking about? They are 80 years old and they are still fighting to get their pensions. When they came out with the VIP for the wives of our veterans, the only ones who got it were from 1981 and up. The

ones before that do not deserve it, according to the Conservative government and the former Liberal government. They never gave it to our veterans.

If we want to give support to our soldiers when they go to war, we should give them support when they come back from war. They should not have to fight for it the way they are fighting for it today. Every day, every office of every member of Parliament has to fight to try to get something for our veterans. It is a shame the way they are being treated. Go talk to the veterans, but not only on the 11th of November. We should talk to them every day, listen to them and give them answers.

The support should be there when they come back too, and neither the Conservative government nor the Liberal government has done things for our soldiers when they come back. If we want to talk about supporting women, we should support our own women too, the wives of our veterans who are suffering every day because of the—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** Questions and comments. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. The member should try to keep his comments to one minute.

**Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that the NDP think that the milk of human kindness courses through the veins of everybody in the world. If we truly profess to support human rights, what on earth are we going to do when narco-warlords or fundamentalists go to a clinic or go to a school and threaten to chop the heads off the teachers and the people who work there? What on earth is the member going to do? Is he going to offer a carnation in response? There is only one option. Development demands security. Unless there is security, there can be no development.

Will the member support the four pillars approach of Afghanistan security that are in the motion? Will he also support the internal political reconciliation we have championed within Afghanistan that will produce real results of peace and security within the country?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, the last time we asked Parliament to bring our troops back, the Liberals were split on it. I would like to ask the member why.

I will say something in French that a writer said:

[*Translation*]

Peace is not achieved through the fear of war, but through the love of peace.

[*English*]

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's involvement in Afghanistan is one of either war or peace. The Prime Minister's Conservatives, helped out by their Liberal friends, are staying the course on destruction, counter-insurgency and George Bush's war.

We know that opium production is up, corruption is up, crime is up, and the rate of violence is up, in fact up by 20% since 2006. The number of Afghan civilians killed has doubled since 2005 and last year alone NATO bombs killed over 6,500 Afghani people. We are talking about 6,500 lives and no one really seems to care. The situation is getting worse; it is not getting better.

*Government Orders*

Over the last few months food prices, especially those containing wheat and wheat flour, have increased by 60% to 80%. If our mission in Afghanistan is to better the lives of the Afghan people, we are failing. NATO is failing and the international community is failing. That is why it is time for a change in direction.

Canada has already spent \$7 billion on this war. How much has it spent on peace? Less than \$700 million has been spent on development aid. Imagine what we could do if we turned those numbers around. Imagine what \$7 billion in aid could do.

Hundreds of thousands of children in Africa could live free of AIDS, hunger, starvation, malnutrition, malaria, and hundreds of thousands of children in Darfur, Congo and Afghanistan could live full lives and be educated. Instead, many are now starving and living in fear of death.

Canada spent \$4.7 billion on planes and tanks. This amount could provide 30,000 homes for ordinary families. That means 30,000 affordable homes with roofs and warm beds. It would also mean that thousands of children would not have to move every few months because their families have no permanent place to call home.

At the end of the day, there is a choice to be made. Canada can invest in war and the military or in average Canadian families. Last year the Conservative government spent \$18.2 billion on the military, but on early childhood education, does anyone know how much it spent? It spent \$1.2 billion. How much did it spend on housing? It spent \$2 billion, which is far short of what we need to support hard-working families.

No wonder Canada has the worst housing crisis since the Great Depression. In terms of child care and investment, no wonder Canada is at the bottom of the heap of the OECD countries. That is a dirty secret. That is right, we are at the bottom of the heap.

The Conservatives have no problem with cutting and running. What do they do? They cut child care funding, women's programs, affordable housing retrofit programs, and run the government with military lobbyists. They run away from tough questions, like telling Canadian families why our troops are in Afghanistan. What is our purpose in Afghanistan? What is our definition of success?

They are running away from doing the tough political work and peace negotiations. They are running away from using Canadian skills and expertise to bring various factions in Afghanistan to the table to talk about peace. They are running away from putting in place an effective disarmament program even though 65% of Afghans say that disarmament is the most important step toward improving security in Afghanistan.

● (1550)

The government is running away from involving regional actors like Pakistan, cooperation that would lead to regional peace, security and prosperity. With this cut and run strategy, no wonder a growing number of Afghans are joining or supporting the Taliban and other armed groups. No wonder there is more violence. No wonder there is a rise in insurgency. No wonder there is more corruption.

Surely, staying on this path and on this course is absurd. It is not working. It is not going anywhere fast. This strategy has been tried for seven years in a row. It is ineffective and it is failing.

The counter-insurgency combat mission has failed to build security for the Afghan people. It has failed to build a robust economy. It has failed to have gender equality. It has failed to have a stable and lasting peace.

A few months ago, this winter, over 900 Afghans died of cold and starvation. They will never see a conclusion to this war. What about those children who had to be sold by their parents in northern Afghanistan so their families could buy coal and bread? What kind of future do they expect?

Tomorrow will never come for the Canadian soldiers who fought and died in Afghanistan. Tomorrow will never come for the 26,000 children under five years of age who die every day because we are not investing enough in foreign aid. Tomorrow will not come for thousands of children living in poverty while their families are desperately waiting for affordable housing.

This is the legacy of war: more destruction, more death, more dying. This is not the path we want.

Speaking about legacies, let us stop for a moment to consider the legacy of that once mighty Liberal Party of Canada. The Liberal Party is so divided it has no courage to face the reality of war. It is so divided that it is willing to betray all its principles and support the Conservative government once again, and over again. In doing so, this proud party is betraying Canada's values of peace. It is betraying the principles of peacekeeping, development, aid, reconstruction and human rights.

Today, the respected writer and journalist Linda McQuaig said in the *Toronto Star* that the Liberal leader is "helping [the Prime Minister] transform Canada from a respected player on the world stage into a stick-wielding loudmouth, braying at the world from a protected perch inside the American empire". How have the mighty fallen?

The NDP and the majority of Canadians want an end to the war. We are saying yes to peace negotiations. We are saying yes to reconstruction. We are saying yes to aid.

I am proud to stand here on behalf of the New Democratic Party of Canada and say that we should not extend the war. We should end it and bring the troops home right now.

● (1555)

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Trinity—Spadina has laid out her party's position on the mission in Afghanistan.

I point out to her that in the 19th century the United Kingdom, the United States and many other allies pursued a policy of splendid isolation. Before Woodrow Wilson became President of the United States, the Americans pursued this policy of splendid isolation. They did not engage in complex problems overseas. They thought that those problems would always stay away.

If there is anything that the 20th century taught us, it is that we cannot live in splendid isolation. We live in an interconnected world. That is why external affairs diplomats like Norman Robertson and Humphrey Wrong, both of whom are buried in Wakefield just a few miles from here, crafted Canada's multilateralist foreign policy.

It is something on which Canada has built a reputation over the decades. Now in the 21st century the NDP is arguing that we should unilaterally withdraw from our mission in Afghanistan.

The NDP's position on this is one of two things. Either it wants to return us to the isolationist policies of the 19th century which led to the bloodshed in the 20th century or it is completely naive that we could do diplomacy and development work without defence.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the Canadian men and women who served in the second world war. I am proud of what they have done in places like Hong Kong. I am proud of their accomplishments. But I am also proud of the government that did not send our troops to Vietnam. I am proud of that because that was not a war that we should have been engaged in. I am very impressed that at that time the government did not agree to go with the U.S. to Vietnam. Just like today, we should never go to Iraq.

In terms of Afghanistan, on February 2, 2002, when the first wave of Canadian troops went into Afghanistan, it was under U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom. Right from the beginning, it was a George Bush war. It was not about reconstruction, not about gender equality, not about development, and it was not about aid. That is not the path we want to choose.

We want to choose peace through negotiation. We want to do the tough work to bring people together. That is the skill, the legacy, that Canada has. It is not one of just fighting a war. It is one of peace negotiations. That is the legacy that I want to have Canada follow, not the wrong path of staying the course that is completely in the wrong direction.

• (1600)

[Translation]

**The Speaker:** There are two minutes remaining for questions and comments for the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

[English]

However, in the circumstances, because it is so difficult to hear in the chamber, I am going to suggest we simply await the arrival of the next speaker in the debate that is supposed to start at this moment.

It is almost impossible to hear and it is not fair to the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina to have to make her remarks now, if that is all right with hon. members.

We will take a break from the debate for a moment.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 4:01 p.m.)

[Translation]

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 4:04 p.m.)

### *The Budget*

**The Speaker:** It being 4 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Motion No. 6, concerning the budget presentation.

\* \* \*

[English]

### THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC)** moved:

That this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the budget documents for 2008, including notices of ways and means motions. The details of the measures are contained in these documents.

• (1605)

[Translation]

I am asking that an order of the day be designated for consideration of these motions.

[English]

I also wish to announce that at the earliest opportunity the government will introduce bills to implement the measures in this budget.

The budget is balanced, taxes have been cut and Canadians will now have a powerful new incentive to save money tax-free, the tax free savings account that we are announcing today.

Our government is meeting the challenge of global economic uncertainty with a plan that is real, a plan that is responsible and a plan that is working. The fundamentals of the Canadian economy are strong. We are running surpluses and paying down substantial amounts of debt. We are reducing the tax burden to the lowest level since the government of John George Diefenbaker.

Inflation is low and stable, interest rates are low and unemployment is the lowest it has been in 33 years, but Canada is not an island.

[Translation]

Challenges from abroad impact us here at home: the economy in the United States, our biggest trading partner, is slowing down; there is volatility in global financial markets; some sectors of our economy are struggling; and the overall Canadian economy will likely grow more slowly over the next two years.

Meeting these challenges is critical not just for our country, but for our families.

[English]

We have come to a fork in the road. Some would have us go down the path to higher spending, higher interest rates and higher taxes, perhaps even an increase in the GST. However, that approach is misguided.

*The Budget*

There is another way. Our government is taking the path that requires focus, discipline and prudence and we know where we are going and we have a plan to take us there: Advantage Canada. It is an economic plan rooted in reality, a plan that is responsible, a way forward for the long term.

Our government recognizes the coming challenges and we move forward with a sense of purpose and determination. We have been preparing for the prospect of slower growth, laying stronger economic foundations and keeping our eye on core federal responsibilities.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Last spring, in budget 2007, we brought in temporary tax help for manufacturers with a \$1.3 billion accelerated capital cost allowance incentive.

In the fall economic statement, we acted decisively with \$60 billion in tax relief, including a further reduction in the GST, a reduction in personal income taxes and historic reductions in business taxes.

In fact, this year alone our government is injecting \$21 billion of stimulus into the Canadian economy. As a share of the economy, this is significantly greater than the stimulus package offered by the U.S.

In January, we announced the community development trust to support workers and communities already feeling the pinch.

[English]

We are also providing additional support for Canadian farm families: better access to \$3.3 billion in advances to cope with extraordinary market pressures in the livestock sector and \$50 million to help the hog sector adjust to new market realities.

Some say that we should not have provided tax relief for individuals, families, workers and seniors. They call it blowing the surplus. It takes a certain kind of Ottawa politician to view giving people their hard-earned money back as blowing the surplus.

[Translation]

Today, our government is proud to say Canadians pay less tax: a \$2,000 tax credit for every child in every family; the Canada employment credit; a fitness tax credit for kids; pension income splitting for seniors and pensioners; and the GST reduced to 5%.

[English]

In the weeks to come, Canadians across the country will file their tax returns and they will see the \$2.9 billion of retroactive personal tax relief announced last fall. We did not wait, we acted, and Canadians can see the results.

To date, our government has taken actions that will provide nearly \$200 billion in tax relief over this and the next five years, \$140 billion of which will be for individuals. And taxes will continue to decline, thanks to our tax back guarantee.

As we pay down the federal debt, interest savings are being returned to Canadians in personal income tax relief. We are reducing the federal debt by more than \$37 billion, including \$10.2 billion this fiscal year. As a result, by 2009-10, personal income tax reductions

provided under the tax back guarantee will amount to \$2 billion. Instead of a year-end spending spree, we are giving Canadians a direct stake in and a direct benefit from debt reduction.

If we are to help families prepare for the long term, we must ensure Canadians have the right incentives to save for the future. Saving is not always easy but it is important. Unfortunately, for too long, government punished people who did the right thing.

[Translation]

As one of my constituents recently said to me, "I go to work. I collect my pay. I pay my taxes. And after I pay my expenses each month, I try to put some money away. I do not have a lot. But I am reaching my goal".

"Yet, the federal government taxes me on what I earn on my savings and my investments. Savings and investments I socked away with after-tax income. Why am I being punished for doing the right thing?"

He is right. And we are going to change that.

• (1615)

[English]

The government will unveil the single most important personal savings vehicle since the introduction of the RRSP, and that is the new tax-free savings account. This flexible, registered, general purpose account will allow Canadians to watch their savings grow tax free. It is the first account of its kind in Canadian industry. This is how it works.

First, Canadians can contribute up to \$5,000 every year to a registered tax-free savings account, plus carry forward any unused room to future years.

Second, the investment income, including capital gains earned in the plan, will be exempt from any tax, even when withdrawn.

Third, Canadians can withdraw from the account at any time without restriction. Better yet, there are no restrictions on what they can save for.

Finally, the full amount of withdrawals may be re-contributed to their tax-free savings account in the future to ensure no loss in a person's total savings room.

An RRSP is primarily designed for retirement. In many ways, a tax-free savings account is like an RRSP for everything else in one's life.



*The Budget*

[Translation]

It is a powerful incentive to save: to help young people saving for their first car; to buy a first home; to help seniors stretch their retirement savings further; or to help people set aside a bit of cash each month for a special project, to help their kids, or to simply treat themselves.

[English]

To make it easier for lower and modest income Canadians to save, there will be no clawbacks. Neither the income or capital gains earned in a tax-free savings account, nor the withdrawals from it, will affect eligibility for federal income tested benefits such as the guaranteed income supplement.

[Translation]

The generations that came before us deserve to live their retirement years with dignity and respect.

Many seniors are living on a fixed income. Oftentimes, they find it difficult to make ends meet. This year alone, our government is providing about \$5 billion in tax relief for seniors and pensioners, including a doubling of the pension income amount to \$2,000; increasing the age credit amount by \$1,000; increasing the age limit for maturing RPPs and RRSPs; and for the first time ever in Canada, pension income splitting for seniors and pensioners.

[English]

However, we can do more to support our seniors. Today we are increasing the guaranteed income supplement exemption to \$3,500 from the current maximum of \$500. This will benefit low and modest income seniors who choose to continue working.

Financially, it can be challenging for seniors but it can also be challenging for those living in northern and isolated communities. To help offset the higher cost of living, we are increasing the daily amount of the northern residents deduction by 10% to \$16.50. This increase will bring the maximum amount of the residency deduction to \$6,022.50. This is long overdue.

As I say, this is long overdue. The northern residents deduction has not been increased since finance minister Michael Wilson stood in this place and delivered his budget in 1986.

[Translation]

Our government is also committed—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

• (1620)

[English]

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The Minister of Finance has the floor and we need to be able to hear the speech.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Our government is also committed to making Canada a great place to create and expand a business. As international competition increases, steps must be taken to encourage investment and sharpen our competitive edge.

That is why we have abolished the federal capital tax and provided a financial incentive to encourage provinces to eliminate their capital taxes as quickly as possible.

[English]

That is why last fall we set out a long term plan to reduce the federal corporate income tax rate to 15% by 2012. This bold initiative will give Canada the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G-7 by 2010 and the lowest statutory tax rate in the G-7 by 2012.

That is why we are calling on the provinces to reduce their corporate income taxes. Our goal is to achieve a combined federal-provincial tax rate of 25% by 2012. This will not only give a lift to our traditional industries, but will make our competitive business taxes a powerful brand globally. Some, like British Columbia, have already taken significant steps in this direction.

Our tax relief measures are working now for the benefit of all Canadians. Actions taken by the Government since 2006 are providing \$21 billion in incremental tax relief to Canadians and Canadian businesses this year. This is a significant and substantial economic stimulus, equivalent to 1.4% of Canada's GDP.

[Translation]

A year ago, we could see that Canadian manufacturers and processors were facing very challenging times. That's why, in budget 2007, we brought in a temporary accelerated capital cost allowance. This initiative allows manufacturing businesses to fully write off investments in machinery and equipment over a two-year period.

By 2009–10, this measure alone will benefit the manufacturing and processing sector to the tune of \$1.3 billion. It is helping Canadian manufacturers make the investments needed to build modern facilities here at home and still take on the world.

[English]

Today, our government is going even further. We are extending the temporary accelerated capital cost allowance treatment for three years on a declining basis. This will provide the manufacturing and processing sector with an additional \$1 billion in tax relief.

We are also investing in research and development to strengthen our economy and stimulate innovation and discovery.

The auto sector has been a major driver of the Canadian economy. Automotive engineers, assembly workers and parts manufacturers are the foundation of many communities like my riding of Whitby–Oshawa. Our government knows how important it is for our auto sector to get out in front of the competition and stay there. Technology is quickly evolving and we must be relentless in our pursuit of new breakthroughs.

*The Budget*

As a result, we are providing \$250 million for an automotive innovation fund. This money will fuel the development of greener and more fuel efficient vehicles. This will help preserve the environment. It will also help preserve and create high quality jobs. This is the kind of investment promised in our 2007 science and technology strategy.

Today, we are providing an additional \$440 million in this and the next two years to secure Canada's leadership in the global marketplace through research and innovation. This includes \$80 million annually for university research to meet the innovation needs of Canada's automotive, manufacturing, forestry and fishing industries, to address health priorities and to advance social and economic development in the north.

• (1625)

[Translation]

As the economy slows, Canada's communities need help too.

Our \$1 billion community development trust is providing vulnerable communities facing major downturns with much needed financial assistance. It supports workers in areas where the entire region is struggling by funding job training, community transition plans that create new jobs, and infrastructure and other initiatives that stimulate economic diversification.

Today, we are also providing additional support for older workers who have been laid off. We are extending the targeted initiative for older workers through to 2010. This is a new \$90 million investment in capable, experienced workers aged 55 to 64. It will allow them to remain productive participants in the workforce and help alleviate labour shortages.

[English]

The employment insurance program is a safety net for struggling Canadian workers. To strengthen the EI account, our government is creating the Canada employment insurance financing board. Starting in 2009, this new, independent crown corporation will be responsible for implementing a new EI premium rate-setting mechanism and maintaining a cash reserve of \$2 billion provided by the government. With this reform, Canadian workers and communities can be confident that EI will be managed on a truly break-even basis.

Even in good economic times, there are those at risk of being left behind. But Canadians are guided by the values of compassion, kindness and generosity. That is why the Mental Health Commission was struck last year. Under the leadership of the Hon. Michael Kirby, the commission has recommended the government proceed with five pilot projects across the country. These will help increase our knowledge of those who are homeless and suffering from mental illness.

Today, we are providing \$110 million to establish demonstration projects in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Moncton. These initiatives will allow us to establish best practices in addressing the needs of these vulnerable people as we go forward. This is an important step toward dealing with this problem.

To support our communities and ensure the competitiveness of the Canadian economy, Canada needs access to modern infrastructure. Our government is making the largest single federal investment in

public infrastructure since World War II through our building Canada plan. This is a total of \$33 billion over seven years for roads, bridges, water systems, public transit and international gateways.

To help us maximize this investment, we have created a new crown corporation called PPP Canada Inc. It will be the first public-private partnership office of its kind at the federal level in Canada. By increasing our use of P3s and taking into account contributions by other levels of government, we should be able to leverage a \$100 billion investment in infrastructure.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Another key component of our building Canada plan is the federal gas tax fund. This is direct funding to our cities, towns and communities for essential infrastructure. In budget 2007, our government extended this funding to 2014.

Today, we are announcing the permanent extension of gas tax funding, which will reach \$2 billion per year in 2009-10. Municipalities large and small, from coast to coast, will be able to plan and finance their infrastructure needs with this additional funding, every year, forever.

[English]

Public transit is one of the keys to achieving a cleaner and healthier environment. That is why our government has been making significant investments to provide alternative transportation options. In order to entice people out of their cars and onto public transit, we have provided \$1.3 billion in support for public transit capital investments and the tax credit for public transit passes.

In addition, today we are providing \$500 million to make further investments in public transit capital infrastructure. This funding will be dedicated to several specific projects, including: the Evergreen Light Rapid Transit System in Vancouver; the re-establishment of the rail link between the city of Peterborough and Toronto's Union Station following the existing right of way; and new equipment and upgrades to dedicated rapid transit routes for the Aéroports de Montréal.

Investing in modern public transit is about preserving our environment. It is about reducing traffic congestion so goods can get to market on time. It is about creating a seamless, modern, safe and secure transportation system for the benefit of all Canadians.

In these challenging times, we are focusing on our core responsibilities.

The federal government has long helped Canadian students finance their education. Today, this historic role has taken on even greater importance. We must ensure that the next generation of Canadians has the opportunity to excel in this increasingly competitive world.

*The Budget*

To that end, our government is investing in a new consolidated post-secondary Canada student grant program. It will be a single focused program that fully respects provincial jurisdiction. It will also provide more effective support to more students for more years of study.

As the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation winds down, the government will provide \$350 million for the Canada student grant program in 2009-10, growing to \$430 million in 2012-13. In comparison to the predecessor programs, this funding will reach an estimated 245,000 students. This is over 100,000 more students from low and middle income families than the current system.

My colleague, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, will be consulting with students and the provinces and territories to finalize specifics of the program.

● (1635)

[Translation]

To develop and attract the next generation of world-class researchers, our government is creating a new class of doctoral scholarships named in honour of former Governor General Georges Vanier.

Governor General Vanier was a true statesman and a hero. He was a soldier who fought in the first world war and was one of the founders of the Royal 22nd Regiment. He was also renowned for his promotion of excellence in youth.

Our government will provide \$100 million over five years beginning in 2008-09 for the Vanier scholarships. These will attract the best doctoral students from here and around the world to study in Canada. The Vanier scholarships will build on Canada's existing strength in graduate education and help build the skilled workforce needed to face the challenges of the future.

To strengthen the ability of Canadian universities to attract and retain the world's top scientific leaders, our government will provide \$21 million to establish Canada global excellence research chairs.

These prestigious research chairs will be offered in the four priority areas identified in the government's science and technology strategy: the environment; natural resources and energy; health; and information and communication technologies.

[English]

This funding will allow each chair to assemble outstanding research teams and undertake cutting edge research in areas of strategic importance to Canada.

Canada also needs to do a better job of bringing aboriginal Canadians into the skilled workforce, another core responsibility.

During my prebudget consultations, Chief Clarence Louie of the Osoyoos First Nation in British Columbia pointed out that there is a large number of aboriginal Canadians willing to work who just need a chance. He suggested that the government's focus needs to shift from social services to economic development and skills training.

Our government could not agree more. Today we are providing \$70 million over the next two years to establish a new framework for aboriginal economic development. This new framework will allow

us to better match the skills and training of aboriginal Canadians with labour market demands.

In addition, we are providing \$70 million over two years to support tripartite agreements with willing first nations and provinces to develop more effective approaches to first nations education.

We are also making important new investments in immigration. In budget 2007, we made significant progress in this area by streamlining the temporary foreign worker program, enabling employers to bring in workers more quickly. We also changed the rules allowing skilled workers and foreign students to remain in Canada as permanent residents, people this country needs.

Today we are going even further. We are changing the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to improve and speed up the application process. It is not fair for prospective immigrants to wait for years before their applications are considered.

● (1640)

[Translation]

In addition, we are providing \$22 million in new funding to support immigration initiatives over the next two years. This funding will improve the responsiveness of our immigration system and better align it with our labour market needs.

Focusing on our core responsibilities also means preserving and protecting the environment. Canadians demand and expect that action is being taken to reduce harmful emissions and to crack down on polluters.

Since 2006, our government has announced numerous initiatives to support cleaner energy, clean transportation alternatives, cleaner air and water, and the development of green technology.

Our government has committed to reduce Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions 60% to 70% by 2050. This is an ambitious and achievable goal.

[English]

Today we are taking action to fulfill our commitment to a cleaner, healthier environment.

Our government is committing \$250 million for carbon capture and storage projects.

Our government is also providing \$66 million over two years to lay the foundation for market based mechanisms that will establish a price for carbon and support the development of carbon trading in Canada.

Our government is also providing \$21 million over two years for resources to better enforce our environmental laws.

*The Budget*

Our government is also providing \$13 million over two years to accelerate access to cleaner renewable fuels for cars and trucks, and our government is further expanding tax incentives for clean energy generation.

Canadians want a healthy environment. They also want healthy, safe communities. Today our government is taking another step toward building safer communities and putting criminals out of business.

We are putting more police officers on our streets. We are providing \$400 million to hire 2,500 new front line police officers over the next five years. This money will be available to provinces and territories that have publicly committed to new recruitment programs.

Our government is also delivering additional support for our brave men and women in the Canadian Forces and their families.

In this budget, we are providing stable, predictable funding with annual increases in defence spending of 2% starting in 2011–12.

We are also helping survivors of veterans with \$282 million over this and the next two years to expand the veterans independence program.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Since taking office, our government has been vigilant in focusing and reviewing government spending. We want to ensure Canadians receive full value for the money they pay in taxes.

The government has introduced a new expenditure management system with a greater focus on results. Under this new approach, the President of the Treasury Board is leading strategic reviews of all departmental spending. These reviews are about better management and ensuring that all government spending is aligned with the priorities of Canadians.

In this initial review year, 17 organizations participated in strategic reviews, examining department spending amounting to \$13.6 billion, or 15% of total direct program spending. As a result, they are streamlining operations, realigning their activities and transforming their organizations in order to deliver better results.

All savings from these reviews are being directed to new initiatives in these departments and other priorities in this budget.

[*English*]

Focusing on our core responsibilities also means strengthening Canada's economic union.

Nowhere is this ambition of a stronger economic union more important than in the domain of capital markets. That is why our government put forward a plan to create a Canadian advantage in global capital markets, a plan that will benefit Canadian enterprises seeking capital and Canadian investors looking for investment opportunities for their savings.

I have appointed an expert panel on securities regulation. It will advise me and provincial-territorial ministers on the content, structure and enforcement of securities regulation, including a

model common securities act. The expert panel will report by the end of this year.

Canada has had a strong year. We are well positioned to weather any sudden economic storms. Our government has taken care to strengthen our economic fundamentals.

The economy grew faster than expected a year ago when I presented budget 2007. The extra federal revenues we received have been used in a balanced way.

In the fall economic statement, we announced lower taxes, some of them retroactive to the beginning of 2007.

This year, we are providing substantial economic stimulus: \$21 billion in incremental tax relief to Canadians and Canadian businesses. This is equivalent to 1.4% of Canada's GDP.

Including measures announced today, we are providing \$1.1 billion in one-time efforts to help workers and communities that are already feeling the effects of the slowing economy.

Finally, we are reducing the debt by \$10.2 billion this fiscal year, bringing our cumulative debt reduction since coming to office to more than \$37 billion.

There are challenges on the horizon. We are seeing increased global uncertainty, but we are prepared. We have a long term economic plan, Advantage Canada, and we are building on that plan.

Today's budget is prudent, disciplined and realistic. It is focused on preparing Canada and Canadians for the challenges ahead.

It lets Canadians save tax free with tax-free savings accounts.

It helps students, seniors and workers, especially older and displaced workers.

It focuses federal spending on core responsibilities.

It strengthens the integrity of the EI account to ensure it will be managed on a truly break-even basis.

It tackles the consequences of mental illness and homelessness, adds new funds for more police, and sets aside stable, dependable funding for Canadian municipalities and the Canadian Forces.

Today's budget provides a further boost to Canadian businesses, especially manufacturers, and strengthens the economic union.

Canadians do not want our economy to slide back to high spending, high debt and higher taxes. Prudent management, focus and discipline will serve us well as we face the challenges ahead.

• (1650)

**The Speaker:** Order, please. Questions and comments.

*The Budget*

I wish to warn members that I expect that none of the questions or answers will exceed one and a half minutes, so we can get at least three questions in, one from each of the three opposition parties in the 10 minutes that is allotted for questions and comments. So, one and a half minutes max and if they are shorter that is fine, then we might get a fourth question.

We will begin with the hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, whenever this minister uses the words “prudent” or “frugal”, Canadians should know that what he really means is that he has broken the bank.

Having inherited record surpluses two years ago, he proceeded to spend like crazy, earning the title “highest spender since Confederation” from Andrew Coyne, who is himself hardly a Liberal.

So the consequence today is that the fiscal cupboard is largely bare and the minister has just announced a projected surplus two years from now of \$1.3 billion before any contingency reserve. Anyone who knows anything about finance knows that that is a nanosecond from deficit financing.

My question is this. Why did this fiscally incompetent minister so squander his massive Liberal fiscal inheritance when he is on the verge of returning to that territory so familiar to Conservatives, non-stop, year after year, deficit financing by every Conservative prime minister from R.B. Bennett to Kim Campbell? That is where he is heading.

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy getting a lecture on spending from a Liberal.

When the Liberals were in government, and we can go back to the time of Jean Chrétien or the member for LaSalle—Émard, what was their spending like? Over five years spending increases averaged 8.2%. In one year alone, in 2004-05, they increased spending 14.8%.

There may be an explanation. I think that was the year they did three budgets in one year with the help of the New Democratic Party. It may be understandable that they were even more out of control that year than they were in the preceding five years.

We do not need any lessons from the big spenders, the big taxers, the people that create big debt in Canada. That is the Liberal Party that ruled this country for 13 years driving up debt.

• (1655)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind this House that on June 28, 2005, the Prime Minister, then the official opposition leader, told Joyce Carter in a written letter, in a promise, that all widows of World War II and Korean veterans would be covered by VIP, all of them, not some of them. Then Joyce Carter of Cape Breton came here and in June of last the Prime Minister told her to her face that all widows of all the veterans of World War II and Korea would be covered.

Now we get a document that says only some of them will be covered. Only those in financial need or eligible for disability tax credits need apply. The documents at Veterans Affairs say that at least \$333 million per year is needed to provide all of them simply with groundskeeping and housekeeping services.

Why did the minister deliberately mislead the widows of the brave heroes of our country?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to announce a few minutes ago that we are helping survivors of veterans with \$282 million over this year and the next two years to expand the veterans independence program.

I would remind the member who posed the question that, when he reviews the merits of the program, the foundation of this program is a disability program.

I would also remind the member that in this House every time a provision has come forward in recent years to support veterans or to support dependents has he stood up? Yes, he has stood up and has voted against.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know I speak for all members in the House in congratulating the Finance Minister on his third consecutive balanced budget.

This is a budget that builds on our record of almost \$200 billion in tax cuts with the groundbreaking new tax-free savings account. On behalf of overtaxed Canadians, I thank the minister for this landmark achievement that will benefit Canadians permanently.

Could the Minister of Finance please share with the House how my constituents and how all Canadians will benefit from this tax free savings account?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his tireless work for his constituents. He is, without a doubt, the finest MP the people of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell have had in a very long time.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Minister of Finance has the floor and everyone wants to hear his answer.

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, the new landmark tax-free savings plan is one we are doing it. This is a remarkable new plan. It is the most important savings plan in modern Canadian history, the most important plan since 1957 when the RRSP plan was introduced.

This new plan would give all Canadians, from seniors to those with low and modest incomes, the opportunity to earn tax-free savings income with maximum flexibility.

In 20 years, it is estimated that these plans will permit over 90% of Canadians to hold all of their financial assets in tax efficient savings vehicles.

This is not a small program. As these tax-free savings accounts mature over time, the cost will move up to about \$3 billion over the course of the next 20 years.

I encourage Canadians to check the tax-free savings calculator on the website at [www.budget.gc.ca](http://www.budget.gc.ca) to see how much tax they can save.

*The Budget*

•(1700)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I could examine several points, but since my time is limited, I will focus on just two.

For over two years, the government has been saying that it would hire 2,500 police officers and so far it has done nothing. Now it has announced \$400 million to hire these police officers. I hope this will not take 10 years, because people need action now.

Also, it could be said that this government has abandoned the cultural community. There is nothing for the feature film fund or the television fund. But the Conservatives are making announcements all over Quebec. Unfortunately, there is absolutely nothing for culture and even less for Quebec.

[*English*]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, we are continuing the \$30 million funding for the Canada Council that was announced previously.

I am very proud of this budget. I thank the Secretary of State for Sport for her strong support for the Olympics. We are providing additional support for the torch relay for the Olympics and for the Paralympics all across Canada. We are also supporting the summer Olympics with \$24 million over two years to help our summer athletes become as expert and successful as we know our winter athletes will be at Whistler.

We also have a large program, as I am sure the hon. member knows, announced in the budget to support our four major national museums. They are capital programs in Canada.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak again. Perhaps I could very briefly speak as an economist and a student of Canadian history with regard to the answer of the finance minister. These are facts.

When Mr. Chrétien, whom he mentioned, came to power, he inherited a \$42 billion Conservative deficit. Within four years he had put that deficit into a surplus, balanced the books and then ran eight consecutive years of surplus. That is the happy situation the minister inherited from Mr. Chrétien's Liberal successor. Those are the facts.

I have also examined growth rates of program spending by government and I am happy to share them with the minister in a non-

political fashion. If we take the whole Liberal period from 1993 to 2005, the growth rate was less than half of the growth rate under his two years of government. Those are facts and I do not want to enhance them with political histrionics.

I will go on very briefly to say that this is a budget that is mile wide and an inch deep. It is a shotgun approach which has no focus at all. To the extent there is any merit in this budget, it consists of the fact that the government has taken Liberal ideas and applied those ideas to its budget, generally speaking, in a watered down fashion.

Let me end by just giving a few examples of these borrowed or stolen Liberal ideas.

[*Translation*]

Here is the first example: permanently transfer the gas tax, as we promised in February 2007.

Here is a second example: provide direct support to the automotive sector, as we requested in January 2008.

Here is a third example: create jobs and improve public transit by making new investments in infrastructure, as we recommended in February 2008.

Here is a fourth example: set aside funds to hire additional police officers, as we promised in March 2007.

•(1705)

[*English*]

I could go on with all the examples of Liberal commitments and ideas that have been borrowed and then implemented in a highly unsatisfactory, watered down way but I will not go on because I will have the opportunity to speak at greater length tomorrow.

Therefore, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), the motion is deemed adopted, and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 5:06 p.m.)







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