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Monday, March 10, 2008

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 10, 2008

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-203, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

• (1105)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill S-203.

[*Translation*]

Motion No. 3 will not be selected by the Chair as it was defeated in committee.

[*English*]

All remaining motions have been examined and the Chair is satisfied that they meet the guidelines expressed in the note to Standing Order 76.1(5) regarding the selection of motions in amendment at the report stage.

Motions Nos. 1 and 2 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 and 2 to the House.

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill S-203 be amended by deleting the long title.

Motion No. 2

That Bill S-203 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

She said: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my party and the constituents I represent in Parkdale—High Park in Toronto, I am pleased to speak to the motions to amend Bill S-203.

I believe that the current configuration of Bill S-203 does not adequately deal with the issue of cruelty to animals. As we all know, the current Criminal Code sections dealing with cruelty to animals date back to 1892. There were minor revisions made in the 1950s, but the basis for the protection of animals comes from their status as property, not sentient beings.

It is an archaic notion that animals are not sentient beings and only exist as property and certainly is not in keeping with understanding, with science and with public sentiment at this time. Several attempts have been made to move animals out of the property section of the Criminal Code, beginning with Bill C-17 in 1999, Bill C-15B in 2001, Bill C-10 in 2002, Bill C-22 in 2004 and Bill C-50 in 2005. All of these bills were either stalled at the Senate or died on the order paper in the House of Commons before they could be passed.

Objections were raised by a coalition of groups opposing the changes, including the Fur Institute and the Federation of Hunters and Anglers. As a result of this pressure, Senator Bryden introduced a bill, originally Bill S-24, now Bill S-203, which increased fines and sentencing and allowed a court order to prohibit offenders from keeping an animal. This was introduced in 2005, was reintroduced as Bill S-213 in 2006, and now has been reintroduced as Bill S-203 as of October 2007.

• (1110)

The reason for my motion to amend the bill and to delete these sections is that the bill leaves animal cruelty in the property section of the Criminal Code and keeps the existing 1892 terminology, which makes it extremely difficult to secure convictions.

We need look no further than the situation as detailed in the media this past weekend concerning an Arabian horse farm in Alberta. Officials were unable to lay charges that would secure a conviction with the owner of the farm. Over the weekend a number of horses died from starvation and neglect. The condition of the remaining horses is nothing short of abysmal. They were not fed. They were not given water. Their living quarters were not clean. They existed in absolutely sub-living conditions. Those animals were in fact slowly being tortured to death through starvation and neglect.

The way this bill is currently configured would not lead to any greater likelihood of conviction for animal owners, breeders or those charged with caring for animals and who neglect those animals. The bill also fails to define animals and does not recognize animals as beings and as such does not address the issue of training animals for animal fights.

Private Members' Business

As a result, we have been the only party to consistently oppose this bill. We have been working closely with the IFAW, the World Society for the Protection of Animals and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies in efforts to amend the bill and in our opposition to the bill. I want to thank my NDP colleague from Windsor who has been a constant voice in looking for positive change that would ultimately deal with the issue of animal cruelty.

The issue of animal cruelty is one that touches the hearts of many Canadians. Many of my constituents have contacted me about this issue and they cannot believe that in the 21st century, after so many years of debate and discussion on this issue, that we are still left with a law that treats animals, as it did in the 19th century, as baggage, as non-thinking, non-feeling creatures.

We all know that is not true and that we need to update our laws to reflect this obvious reality. Therefore, the point of my motion is to delete the section of this bill that negates the reality of animals and how they should be treated.

The reason I am urging support for this bill is that it is a change in legislation whose time has come. There is widespread support for this change. If there is any doubt about the necessity for this change, one only needs to read about the terrible tragedy of the Arabian horses lost this past weekend.

I urge my colleagues to vote in support of this motion.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have all heard about a number of high profile cases of animal abuse. One case was Daisy Duke, the pet dog that was dragged behind a car in Didsbury, Alberta; Princess, a house cat in Alberta that was microwaved; Queen Waldorf in Niagara Falls who was found abandoned on a beach with dumbbells attached to her neck; and the list goes on.

The reality of animal abuse is that every day, in every part of our country, animal abuse is occurring. The people who are watching their pets or wild animals being victimized are asking why we have no laws to go after these individuals and why the laws that we have are so weak. People on the front lines are dealing with animal abuse day in and day out and seeing tragedy after tragedy but they are not able to do anything about it.

I talk with SPCA officers who, on a daily basis, receive these calls but they cannot do anything because their hands are tied. I understand their frustration, as people who love animals, when they witness this abuse, but they are more than people who love animals. I have witnessed how angry they get when they visit those same homes where individuals who torture dogs is the precursor to violence against human beings, such as domestic abuse against a spouse or against the children. They and Canadians are left to wonder why this type of crime is something Parliament simply has not done anything about.

In fact, as was mentioned by the previous speaker, the laws that we have in place today have essentially been unamended since 1892. That is not to say that in the last number of years Parliament has not tried because it has. If we look at the bills that have been put before this House over the last number of years, there is Bill C-17, Bill C-15, Bill C-15B, Bill C-10, Bill C-10B and, as recently as the last Parliament, Bill C-50. In this Parliament, we have my private

member's bill, Bill C-373 and Bill S-203, which we are debating today.

I had a great deal of opportunity to work on Bill C-50 in the previous Parliament and to bring all stakeholders together to find common ground, to ask that all sides make compromise and work on something that would work, not only for those who were proponents of protecting animals, but for those who legitimately use animals for their businesses or for their livelihood.

In doing so we found mere unanimity. We found that almost all groups reached a point of compromise on Bill C-50. In fact, this bill or a similar bill was able to pass through the House of Commons twice. It was the will of this House that strong, effective animal cruelty legislation be adopted and moved forward. It was the will of this elected body that we have animal cruelty legislation that reflected the desire of Canadians. However, both times it was the Senate that stood in our way, the Senate that disagreed and wanted amendments.

We almost got there in the last Parliament but, unfortunately, an election got in our way. One would have thought that after all the work and compromise, upon our return to Parliament we would have immediately embraced that compromise and introduced legislation that addressed animal cruelty.

The reality is that did not happen. It was left to private members' bills to address this gaping hole in our Criminal Code, one introduced by myself and one introduced by Senator Bryden in the form of the bill that is before us today that is seeking to be amended, Bill S-203.

One could ask why we simply do not adopt Bill S-203 as a first step and then we will get to the rest. We could do all those things that Parliament had already agreed on at some later date.

I will give a few reasons why Bill S-203 should not be adopted. I will start with the fact that only one-quarter of 1% of animal abuse complaints result in a conviction. Essentially what this bill would do is go after sentencing. One can imagine that if we are only addressing sentencing, when there are convictions on only one-quarter of 1% of the problem, we are only dealing with one-quarter of 1% of the problem, which effectively would do almost nothing to address the issue.

I just want to list a number of things that Bill S-203 does not do that I think people will be surprised to learn. It does not make it easier to convict the perpetrators of crimes toward animals. It does not make it easier to punish people for crimes of neglect toward animals that they are responsible for. It does not offer greater protection to wild or stray animals which often have no protection at all. It does not clarify the confusing language in existing legislation that deals with types of animals differently. It also fails to make it a crime to train animals to fight each other.

• (1115)

These terrible crimes we see where they are pitting animals against animals and ripping each other apart, it would do nothing to deal with that.

Private Members' Business

The second point is this. When does the House, as an elected body, accept from the Senate a lower standard? For this House to pass legislation twice and then to be told by the Senate that it is too much, too effective, too far and too fast and then to turn it down, one wonders why.

When the Conservatives introduced a bill to get tough on crime, in their words, and then sent it to the Senate, they said that they would not accept any amendments by the Senate. They gave the Senate a limited amount of time to address the bill and said that if the Senate did not pass the bill that they would have an election. Why? It was because crime was important and they needed to address it.

They told the Senate that it needed to listen to the elected will of the House and yet when it comes to animal cruelty there is a double standard. They were willing to say that the House had spoken and that it worked for years to compromise and create effective legislation but, on this bill, crime is not important, it is not a priority, even though, as I mentioned before, it does not just impact animals, it is often a precursor to violence against human beings.

Senator Bryden addressed the issue when he talked about those who wanted effective animal cruelty legislation losing the lever they would have if this bill gets passed. Unfortunately, he is quite right. It is one of the things that those of us who are concerned about our ineffective animal cruelty laws worry most about.

The bill is essentially a placebo. It does nothing to address the real issue of animal cruelty in our country. It will be held out as action when none has been taken. It will be held out as a faint offer of having done something so we can tell our constituents that we acted on animal cruelty when we did nothing more than pass an empty, vacuous bill. We will lose that lever to finally change and amend our laws.

We have already waited 116 years. We embraced years of compromise. As a House, we adopted effective legislation. We will now let the Senate tell us to throw all of that away and to entrench essentially Victorian laws with antiquated notions about what animals are about.

I have a last point on why Bill S-203 should be opposed. Can anyone imagine trying to pass a bill that purports to do something about animal cruelty when every animal welfare group in the country is opposed to it? I am not talking about animal activists. I am talking about those who are on the front lines of dealing with abuse and torture of animals. I am talking about SPCA officers, the humane society and veterinarians who see tortured animals come into their offices and see nothing being done about it. These are the people crying for action and they are not alone.

In fact, Canadians overwhelmingly support effective animal cruelty law. A recent Nanos Research poll found that 85% of respondents supported legislation that would make it easier for law enforcement agencies to prosecute perpetrators who commit crimes against animals, including wild and stray animals. I have a petition of over 130,000 Canadians, which has been presented before the House, in opposition to the Senate bill and calling on support for my bill, Bill C-373.

I do not care if the bill gets passed as my bill or as a government bill. I will gladly give up my bill to anyone in the House who can get

it passed and get it passed immediately. I will make the offer to the government today that I will withdraw my bill and offer it to the government as its own so that we can move forward with effective legislation.

I want to talk about what effective legislation can do, which is Bill C-373. It would allow for the prosecution of negligent animal owners. It would protect the rights of those who work and must kill animals for their livelihood. We would protect those in agriculture and animal use industries. It would offer equal protection to pets and farm animals, as well as wild and stray animals. It would make it illegal to train animals to fight one another. It would make it a crime to kill an animal with brutal or vicious intent.

We need effective animal cruelty legislation. The option exists for us to take action today. Let us reject this watered down, vacuous placebo bill and finally do something about animal cruelty.

• (1120)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated a couple of different viewpoints on this bill. It is a pleasure for me to rise in the House again, on behalf of the people of Crowfoot, to speak to Bill S-203, a bill, as was previously mentioned, that was introduced in the House from the Senate chamber. Bill S-203 would amend the animal cruelty provisions in the Criminal Code.

Many of my constituents have written or contacted my office in regard to this legislation and other pieces of legislation that have come and gone over the years. The member from across the way just made mention of a few of the bills that have been introduced into the House. It has always been an issue that has provoked a certain degree of interest because people do not want to see individuals treating animals cruelly and inhumanely.

Where I come from, many people earn their living on ranches and farms. We are basically a rural constituency. Members can bet their bottom dollar that most ranchers and farmers understand the fact that these animals must be looked after and cared for with a great deal of concern. In most cases, animals are my constituents' livelihood.

I should also make mention that right now, the first part of March, were in the middle of calving season. In the wintertime, although it is very mild back home, I know ranchers, their wives and their children who get up during the night to check on the cattle to ensure everything is all right in the calving process. Therefore, we become very concerned when we hear stories of animal cruelty or abuse and that people are mistreating animals. There is not a lot of toleration for that where I live.

Bill S-203 has been passed by the Senate and sent to the House. It has already passed second reading in the House, was sent to the justice committee, has been reported back to the House by the justice committee without amendment and is now before the House for third reading.

Private Members' Business

Bill S-203 would amend the Criminal Code in relation to the sentencing of offenders convicted of animal cruelty. It does not create new offences and does not modify existing ones.

What problem does Bill S-203 seek to address? The problem is that the existing legislation and penalties do not reflect the seriousness of cruelty offences. With the exception of certain offences, which are only in relation to cattle, all of the animal cruelty offences are summary conviction offences. This means that they carry a maximum sentence of six months or a \$2,000 fine or both. No matter how outrageous or how horrible the action or the consequence to the animal or pet, that is the sentence standard.

To address this serious limitation in the current law, Bill S-203 would enhance the sentencing provision for cruelty offences. It would do so in three significant ways. First, it would make all of the animal cruelty offences hybrid offences. This means that the Crown could elect to proceed by summary conviction or indictment. This would enable the Crown to elect a mode of trial that is appropriate, having regard to the seriousness of the offence and to the culpability of the offender. Again, this is a very important provision, especially in the ranching and farming communities.

A second way in which the sentencing provisions would be enhanced by Bill S-203 is that maximum penalties would be significantly increased. One way that our society traditionally recognizes the seriousness of a particular conduct is by assigning a higher penalty for more serious conduct and infractions. Canadians have made it very clear that the current animal cruelty sentencing provisions do not adequately reflect society's views about the seriousness of the crime. A maximum of six months and a \$2,000 fine is simply inadequate to declare our distaste and disapproval of wilful animal cruelty.

• (1125)

Canadian society has paid little attention to animal cruelty over the years. This ignores the true nature of the crime.

Bill S-203 would remedy this deficiency in the law and would signal to potential abusers that they had better think twice before inflicting undue pain and suffering on animals.

The government also hopes that by supporting Bill S-203 a message will be sent to the courts, the Crown, and police that animal cruelty offences should be looked at more seriously. The member in this speech previously talked about the low rate of conviction on some of these and it sometimes very difficult to prove, *mens rea*, to prove wilful intent.

I think the bill draws out very clearly that the Canadian public want to see tougher sentencing, but they also want to see our law enforcement officers and the Crown taking this type of crime much more seriously.

By supporting Bill S-203, I believe, we as parliamentarians would be reflecting the will of the public in declaring that animal cruelty is a serious crime.

A third manner in which the penalty provisions would be enhanced is that Bill S-203 would remove the current two year maximum duration of an order prohibiting an offender from possessing or living with an animal. The duration of the order

would be at the discretion of the court. The courts and the public clearly agree that some offenders should be denied the privilege of having animals in their homes or in their possession for longer periods than just the two year period that is currently there.

This change would respond to those concerns. It would enable courts to more effectively prevent future offences by proscribing whatever duration was appropriate.

As other hon. members have indicated, the enhanced penalty provisions in Bill S-203 constitute a significant step in better recognizing the true nature of animal cruelty offences as crimes of violence.

The bill is important because it changes the penalty scheme to more accurately reflect the serious nature of animal cruelty offences. The higher penalties in Bill S-203 will go a long way in confirming that Parliament is taking this type of crime more seriously.

In stating my support for Bill S-203, I recognize that some hon. members have expressed the view that they cannot support the bill because it does not address important limitations in the current law.

It is true that Bill S-203 does not amend current offences; it does not create new ones. However, as members well know, none of the bills that have been introduced by previous governments over the course of years have ever passed through both chambers. In addition, it is well known that there is some disagreement, some concern and controversy over many of those bills that were brought forward.

Some animal industry groups feared that certain changes would open the door to prosecutions for their traditional activities. We need not get into the details of that long and drawn out history, but I had the privilege of serving on the justice committee when a number of these bills came forward.

On the one hand we would have animal rights groups appearing and saying that this new bill would not go far enough and on the other hand we would have industry, like ranchers, farmers, beef producers, who would say this moves into traditional ways that we go about our business at the ranch.

Therefore, the bill recognizes that changes have to be made, but that they have to be realistic and they have to take into account all those concerns.

Unlike those previous bills, Bill S-203 is straightforward. We have before us a private senate public bill that has one simple objective: improving the law's ability to deter, to denounce and punish animal cruelty, and make offenders take greater responsibility for their crimes.

While there may be some disagreement in the House about whether Bill S-203 accomplishes everything that some people may want to see, today we have just one question before us: should Bill S-203 be supported?

Private Members' Business

I believe that this question calls for a clear and a simple yes. If this legislation were to pass, the law would be better than it is today. Would it be perfect? I guess that depends on where people's views line up, but this does take a very positive step in addressing a very important issue.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate today at report stage on Senate Bill C-203. This bill would amend the Criminal Code to impose harsher penalties for animal cruelty offences.

This bill is causing quite a stir among people and organizations calling for improved animal cruelty legislation. The current legislation has not been amended since 1892, 116 years ago, when animals were seen as having a utilitarian function rather than a role as companions, which many animals have taken on over time.

In addition, it so happens that Bill S-203 is being debated before Bill C-373, introduced by the member for Ajax—Pickering. Essentially, Bill C-373 is a repeat of Bill C-50, introduced by the previous government, which is more in line with the needs expressed by animal activists. Moreover, the Bloc supported Bill C-50 in principle. But we will analyze Bill C-373 later in the parliamentary process.

Bill S-203 is not perfect. The witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which I sat on at one point last week, often mentioned the obvious flaws in this bill that we have noticed.

First, Bill S-203 does not clearly define negligence, which means that it will still be difficult to prove that someone is acting negligently towards animals. Second, Bill S-203 provides little protection for wild or stray animals. Third, it keeps the categories of animals currently protected by the 1892 legislation: cattle, dogs and birds.

Under Bill S-203, animals would remain primarily property. The bill does not even deal with individuals who train animals for fighting. Moreover, Bill S-203 contains no provisions to address violent, brutal, extreme acts against animals.

I could go on, but it is important to remember that the major flaw in this bill is its failure to define what an animal is.

By refusing to clearly define what they are, Bill S-203 leaves far too much room for interpretations that would avoid heavy penalties and does not depart from the concept that animals are property. We know that the current maximum sentences under the Criminal Code are too lenient for the seriousness of the acts committed against these living beings.

In addition to the fact that Bill S-203 does not jeopardize legitimate activities involving animal death, such as agriculture, hunting and fishing, it addresses the problem I have mentioned: it increases the maximum sentences and the fines. That is a little better than what we had before.

Judges will have a little more latitude in cases involving animal cruelty. For example, a judge could require an offender to cover the

costs incurred by his barbarian actions. We have made progress in the fight against animal cruelty.

However, I think this improvement is minimal, even inadequate when we consider the overall problem. In my eyes, Bill S-203 is just a transition, a step toward something more substantial.

If there is one thing people can count on, it is that the Bloc Québécois does not settle for doing the minimum. We are progressive people with foresight and we will never hesitate to do better for those we represent or for anyone else.

• (1135)

When Bill S-203 was tabled in the Standing Committee on Justice, we listened with interest to the various witnesses.

That is why we are well aware of the bill's limitations. We are aware of the importance of properly protecting animals from cruelty, so we proposed a series of amendments to improve Bill S-203.

Among our proposals was the idea of introducing a clear definition of what an animal is. We also sought to protect stray as well as domestic animals. We also wanted to clarify the criterion for negligence, thereby making it easier to prove. Finally, we also proposed an amendment to formally ban training cocks to fight.

All the Bloc Québécois proposed amendments were rejected. Unfortunately, the committee agreed on Thursday, February 14, to report the bill without amendments. It seems that only the Bloc Québécois truly wants to move quickly in the fight against animal cruelty.

If the other parties had been acting in good faith, if they had put partisanship aside for a minute to make animal welfare a priority, they would have been willing to accept these highly necessary amendments that are adapted to the way things are now.

Instead, we have before us a report saying that Bill S-203 is fine as it is. Only stiffer maximum penalties can remedy the situation. Why act proactively now when Bill C-373 is scheduled to be dealt with shortly? Cruelty against animals will not subside or stop, just to make us feel better, until the study of Bill C-373 can be completed.

From a strictly historical perspective, I remind the House that Bill C-373 stems directly from six previous bills which either died on the order paper or were defeated. There was therefore no progress on the issue. As for Bill S-203, it is the third in a series of identical bills that had the same fate at a time when governments were somewhat more stable than the one we have now.

I can only sympathize with the animal rights advocates who, like us, were seeing a great opportunity to completely overhaul this old legislation. Again, the opportunity is slipping away.

Private Members' Business

Those who interfered will undoubtedly be judged by the people for this blatant lack of initiative, especially on an issue so close to the heart of the public.

I take comfort in the thought that, at least, the Bloc Québécois has done its part, working beyond mere partisanship and putting forward good ideas that would satisfy animal rights advocates. Protecting animals against certain despicable actions will always remain a concern of my party.

At any rate, we are back where we started with an unamended Bill S-203 with all its flaws. That is all that is on the table at this time. The members of the Bloc Québécois are practical people.

Nonetheless, increasing penalties sends a clear signal to criminals—their actions are reprehensible—as well as to the judges who will have to take these factors into account in making a determination.

I will conclude by saying that passing this timid bill will not in any way hinder the future consideration or passage of a more comprehensive piece of legislation like Bill C-373.

I think that the bill introduced by the Liberal member provides better guarantees than Bill S-203, as clearly pointed out by witnesses before the Standing Committee on Justice.

I hope that the House will also pass Bill C-373 when it comes before us. We believe that these two bills are a winning combination to significantly reduce cruelty to animals.

● (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have a Senate bill in front of us today, a private member's bill, which, quite frankly, is a joke. In spite of the speeches from the other three parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals in particular, in support of Bill S-203, it remains a joke.

One of the first things I learned when I went to law school was that if we were going to have effective deterrents to anti-social or criminal behaviour, there had to be laws that could be enforced so that people who were inclined to anti-social or criminal behaviour knew that they would be caught. Everything that I have ever learned since then with regard to how we prevent or deter deviant behaviour to society has confirmed that basic rule.

At the present time the legislation in the Criminal Code with regard to animal cruelty is around 112 years old. There were very minor amendments in the 1950s, but it has not changed since that time.

Today, the reality is that of all the animal cruelty cases in this country, less than 1% of the perpetrators of those offences are ever charged. The reason is that our prosecutors right across the country and in the territories know that the law is so inadequate as it stands that they cannot get convictions. If I have time I will go through some of the examples, but that is the reality today.

In addition, in this bill there is a gross dereliction of responsibility by the political parties in this country and in this House. They are prepared to allow an unelected irresponsible Senate to dictate how we deal with the issue of animal cruelty.

We have heard the history from some of the other members. The bill with regard to animal cruelty in its most recent reincarnation was Bill C-50 which passed back in the 38th Parliament. The legislation has been passed twice by the House of Commons, the elected body in this country, and has been refused to be passed by the Senate twice.

When Bill C-50 was introduced the last time, it was clear that it had all party support because its prior incarnation had in fact received votes in this House from all parties. It was not even the Conservative Party at that time; it was the Alliance. All parties supported it. There were few exceptions; it was not unanimous, but all political parties supported it. It went through this House with overwhelming support and then got stymied by that unelected irresponsible other house. That is where things were until this bill came forward from the Senate.

We hear the argument why not just support the bill. I will say why we should not support it. It does not do anything. It is as simple as that. It does not do one thing to increase the rate of conviction. All it does is increase the penalties. It does not allow our prosecutors to get any more convictions. It does not allow our judges to convict any more people. That less than 1% conviction rate is going to continue.

We will get the odd case where somebody is convicted and perhaps gets a stiffer penalty, and I repeat perhaps. The reality is that it is not going to change the conviction rate.

We have an alternative. Again I think in particular of the Liberals on the justice committee. I introduced the amendments that would have brought the old bill, Bill C-50, into this bill. It would have dealt with the issues that are important with regard to actually protecting animals. It would have brought it into the 21st century. I do not have time to go through all of the points. I introduced those amendments and they were accepted by the chair of the justice committee as proper and admissible. The member of the Conservative Party who is chairing that committee accepted them as proper amendments.

● (1145)

The amendments mimic exactly the private member's bill from the Liberal member for Ajax—Pickering; it is exactly the same. The Liberals on the committee voted those amendments down. The meaningful reform that has passed this House twice was voted down by a combination of the Liberals and the Conservatives on that committee. The Bloc stood with me. The Bloc then moved some other amendments, which did not go as far as C-50 but would have made some significant progress. What happened? The same coalition of Liberals and Conservatives on that committee voted them down.

I want to be very clear about why I believe we absolutely should be voting this bill down. It was made very clear by Senator Bryden, the author of this bill, that the Senate would not accept a bill from this House. Again, a totally irresponsible unelected body is telling members of the elected House that it does not care what we think or do, but it is not letting this bill through. That reinforced my strong belief that we have to get rid of the Senate. That was the attitude.

Private Members' Business

Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives have the political will to challenge the other place on this bill. They basically have thrown up their hands and said, "Okay, senators, whatever you want, we are not going to buck you". That is what we are faced with and our animals will continue to be treated as we saw this past weekend with those horses in Alberta. In that case, 29 horses died. Local officials knew for two years about the abuse that was going on. The amendments that I proposed, C-50, the private member's bill from the member for Ajax—Pickering, would have allowed them to move much earlier to protect those animals and perhaps none of them would have been lost.

That is the reality of what we are faced with today. There are two political parties that are unwilling to challenge the unelected Senate, and then trying to convince the Canadian public that Bill S-203 is anything meaningful and is going to somehow deal with the issue. That is where the farce is. That is why I say this bill is a joke, because it does nothing like that.

I want to make one additional point. We did not hear from the member from the Conservative Party who spoke to this bill this morning, that the current governing party was prepared to do anything about bringing C-50 forward as a government bill, to put in place a law that in fact would protect our animals. It is not saying it is going to do that. The reality is that because of the attitude in the Senate and the lack of political will by both the Conservatives and the Liberals to challenge them, they are not in fact going to bring forward anything further. We are just never going to see these amendments as long as that attitude remains in place.

At this time, 110 to 115 years later, we need to update the legislation to have in place meaningful protection for our animals. In my riding an individual clipped the ears of a dog so that the dog would look fiercer. The dog was used for fighting. We saved that dog and got him adopted, but the reality is that person could already own another dog. We cannot prevent that from happening.

There are all sorts of other provisions. We can think of any number of other abuse cases. There is the one out in Alberta where a dog was dragged behind a vehicle, repeatedly injured, grossly and brutally attacked. There were minimal consequences as a result. That is what we need to bring to an end and that is what Bill S-203 does not do.

It is time for this Parliament to do what it is supposed to do in terms of protecting our animals.

•(1150)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to make some comments with regard to this bill. There is no question that the animal cruelty legislation needs to be updated. We certainly tried in the past to do this with different pieces of legislation, but unfortunately, the Conservatives opposed those updates. There is no question that Canadians want more effective animal cruelty legislation. The legislation has not been updated since 1892.

The question becomes the value of this particular private member's legislation. This legislation does not go far enough in addressing some of the concerns that members of Parliament hear from Canadians. It will not make it easier to convict perpetrators of such crimes. One of the things we continually hear about is the need

to be tougher on the perpetrators. We have heard some horrific stories. Some have been mentioned in this debate and in previous debates. Tougher penalties are needed.

We need to remember when punishing people that they are not being punished for mistreating a piece of furniture, but for mistreating a live animal. The penalty has to reflect that mistreatment. We have to make it easier to deal with people who neglect animals.

On the weekend, we heard of a very tragic case in Alberta with regard to the neglect of horses. Unfortunately, many of them had died and others were very badly malnourished. When people see those things they ask why are we not bringing in tougher animal cruelty legislation.

We need greater protection for wild animals and domestic animals as well. We need to be clearer. Unfortunately, this bill does not go far enough. My colleague from Ajax—Pickering has a private member's bill. It replicates much of the legislation that had been in this House in past Parliaments, such as Bill C-15. My colleague's bill reflects much more of the mainstream concerns of Canadians.

I would also point out that this legislation does not address the situation where animals are trained to fight one another. It does not make that a crime. We have seen in the media some specific examples of that situation, such as cockfighting in Vancouver and the case of Mr. Vick in the United States regarding fighting of animals. Those are the kinds of things that need to be addressed.

If we are going to update legislation which has not been updated in over 100 years, we need to be effective in terms of these issues. We need to address those issues effectively for Canadians. When members get calls on this people are asking why we have taken so long. A lot of it has to do with the fact that we have confused protection of animals with hunting and other issues which some members on the other side have argued we have to be a little more vague on.

In fact, Canadians want to be very specific in terms of addressing the issues. Not only is greater protection needed, but greater clarity in the language is needed as well. Currently the language is very vague, which means that unfortunately, there have not been the kind of convictions that are needed. The courts have said that they can only work with the laws they have before them. They want to see tougher legislation. Canadians want to see tougher legislation.

As parliamentarians, we clearly have an obligation to deal with this type of legislation, and I hope that we do not use a piecemeal approach. The legislation of my colleague from Ajax—Pickering deals with some of the specifics I and others have mentioned in this debate.

Business of Supply

We need to look at a couple of other factors. We need to deal effectively with individuals who neglect animals, not just those who do those horrific things we have heard about in terms of microwaves and so on, which acts are intolerable. We need to deal with those who neglect animals, those who have an animal and are not able to care for it. We must ensure that when people are convicted of a crime, they are not allowed to own animals in the future because of their wanton recklessness in terms of their treatment of animals.

• (1155)

The bill only deals with the status quo. It does not move it along to the degree to which we need. After 100 and some years, one would think, given all the examples and issues that exist, that it would have been much more effective. It is too bad the government had not proposed legislation on this. It is too bad we have to have it through a private member's legislation, as good as that may be, particularly by my colleague on this side of the House. However, the reality is attempts to move this forward by previous governments were stalled, either here or elsewhere. That is reprehensible. We need to have legislation that protects the public good.

We have waited a long time for this. The power to introduce this type of legislation has to be comprehensive. It has to deal with all aspects of the debate. I am hopeful the legislation will move forward.

The question I would have is this. Why has the government failed to take a proactive stance on this? In the past, government legislation was moved forward at different reading stages. It is too bad we did not see a proactive approach from the current government on this. It speaks to the very nature of the government in not caring about animal welfare in particular. It is unfortunate. Had it been proactive, we would not have had to go through other vehicles, including private members' legislation.

I am hopeful the legislation will move forward. Again, however, the bill before us today does not address some of the fundamental issues, unlike what my friend from Ajax—Pickering has suggested. I look forward to that legislation when it is brought before the House.

• (1200)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate on the animal cruelty legislation before us today, a private member's bill that comes from the Senate.

In am pleased to speak on it because I am so frustrated and share the frustration of so many of my constituents with the lack of progress in Parliament on new legislation to protect animals. Many attempts have been made to do this, but they have been stalled or turned down by the Senate over the years. Time and time again, the legislation has failed to go forward.

Now we are presented with this very flawed legislation, legislation that does not address the important problems that we face in society when it comes to dealing with cruelty to animals. As we already have heard this morning, the legislation in front of us is not comprehensive. We need a comprehensive reworking of the animal cruelty laws in Canada.

The legislation currently on the books dates from 1892, and much has changed in our understanding of how we should deal with animals since then. We need to have comprehensive legislation.

The bill today only deals with the question of penalties associated with acts of animal cruelty. It does not deal with fundamental issues like changing the idea that animals are seen as property and not as sentient beings. This needs to be changed. We need to understand that an animal is a sentient being, not just a piece of property. The legislation before us does not deal with this.

For many years, one of the problems with the current legislation is it is almost impossible to get a conviction. That is one of the key frustrations. We have legislation now, but there is less than a 1% conviction rate when it comes to dealing with and punishing people who have been found to have committed cruelty to animals. That is not acceptable.

The bill before us would increase the penalties, but it would do nothing to enable officials to obtain convictions against those who would perpetrate cruelty to animals. That is absolutely unacceptable.

We need comprehensive legislation that updates our understanding of animals in our society and our understanding of our responsibility for them. We also need to make it possible to convict those who would commit acts of cruelty to an animal.

When the justice committee looked at the bill, my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh had a stroke of genius. He proposed an amendment that would replace the provisions of this Senate private member's bill with the old provisions of Bill C-50, a bill that the House supported in its day and sent to the Senate, a bill that was comprehensive legislation, a bill that would not only increase the penalties for those convicted, but would also make it possible to obtain those convictions.

I cannot understand why Liberals and Conservatives on the justice committee would have voted down that amendment when it was found to be in order by the chair. It just does not make sense.

Canadians want action on animal cruelty, and we have stalled too long. The Senate has overturned the efforts of the House of Commons too often in this regard. We have to ensure that we have good, comprehensive, enforceable legislation on this issue. Canadians demand it.

• (1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

When we return to the study of Bill S-203, there will be six minutes left for the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.) moved:

That the House take note of the on-going national discussion about Canada's role in Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to lead off in the debate today with regard to our role in Afghanistan. This side of the House has been and continues to support the efforts that our troops have made in Afghanistan since 2002. As is known, we have rotated in and rotated out in the past with regard to Afghanistan.

There is no question that we are bringing to Afghanistan a multiple of approaches in terms of development of democracy, education of women and the rule of law, et cetera. However, under the UN auspices and under NATO, we on this side of the House we believe this is not simply a Canadian mission. Therefore, everyone has to step up to the plate and do the heavy lifting.

In 2002, when we first went to Kandahar for six months, we rotated out. The principle of rotation is that the 35 members of NATO have to participate in the NATO-led mission, not simply a few. Unfortunately, today the British, the United States and the Dutch clearly are heavily engaged along with Canada. Then other covenants with countries such as Germany and others limit their activity, at night as an example. After Kandahar, we rotated out and went to Kabul. Again, on the principle of rotation, we rotated out and Turkey came in when we left.

No one said that this was a mission in which we would be there forever. We believe heavy lifting must be done by all members of NATO. Therefore, in April 2006, I had the pleasure to go to Afghanistan with the then foreign affairs minister, and we saw what our troops were doing on the ground. At that time, they said that we were the best equipped force on the ground in April 2006, except we needed medium lift. Both the foreign affairs minister and I were ferried around on American Chinook helicopters. We did not have that capability. That is something which I will come back to later, and it is addressed in the motion before the House.

From the beginning, we do not want to politicize this mission. For us, it is a Canadian mission.

In April 2006 the government put forward a motion to extend the mission in the form of military involvement until February 2009. It was after very limited debate, I believe about six hours. From that moment on, we said that the government needed to notify NATO about rotation. It needed to let NATO know that we would change and leave in February 2009. Unfortunately, the government dragged its feet when it came to notification. In fact, there was no notification.

Last month the government put forth a motion with regard to Afghanistan. This party looked at it very carefully and proposed our own approach. After consultation with the government, the government came back and embraced basically 95% of what we had put forward. I congratulate the members on that side for finally listening to Canadians. However, I point out that we said three key things: the mission must change; the mission must end; and it must be more than military.

In terms of the change, we have advocated training of Afghan security forces, whether they be the military, that is the national Afghan army, or the national Afghan police. I think all members of the House would concur, that what we want to see is the Afghans eventually have the ability to provide their own defence, that they are able to protect themselves. Therefore, the aspect of training is

absolutely critical. At the moment, about 60,000 to 70,000 Afghan soldiers have been equipped and trained sufficiently.

• (1210)

The area of policing is absolutely critical. Where the national Afghan army is relatively well paid and trained, the Afghan police are not. We are trying to control an area with the local police that are not properly equipped and not properly trained. Many of these people are susceptible therefore to bribes and corruption because they do not have a sufficient salary and they do not have sufficient training. This is an area where we, on this side of the House, believe we can play a positive and useful role. That is in terms of changing the mission.

In terms of the mission ending, this is not an engagement in which we are there forever. This is a NATO-led mission in which all countries need to play an active and supportive role with regard to our Afghan allies. We have proposed that in terms of the training aspect, that this will all end in February 2011. The government has proposed July 2011 with an eventual withdrawal, I am assuming, by the end of the year. The government finally agreed to an end date, or at least an end year, which is 2011.

The mission must be more than military. We know, and history is a good guide, that military superiority is not possible. We see what happened with the Russians. The Department of National Defence produced a document, 3D, an evaluation of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, which came out in October 2007 which said that superior numbers in the field will not and cannot work. Eventually, it is an issue of national reconciliation, which I will talk about a little later.

The fact is that we also have to deal with the diplomacy side. Diplomacy is absolutely critical in dealing with some of Afghanistan's neighbours, including Pakistan. I have had the pleasure of being to Pakistan several times. I have a number of colleagues in the Pakistan senate, including the former speaker and acting prime minister of the day, Mr. Soomro, who have talked very much and were engaged on the issue of what more Pakistan can do.

Yes, they have 80,000 troops along the border with Afghanistan, but the question is, how effective are they? Obviously, from the diplomatic side, working with our allies, whether it be Pakistan or China to some degree, is important because diplomatic pressure is critical.

We have been very pleased to see a rapprochement between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where President Karzai and President Musharraf have talked about some of the key issues with which they are dealing.

As we know, many of the tribes do not really recognize the border. They are very much interrelated across that boundary. Therefore diplomacy, putting pressure and working with our allies diplomatically, is critical, but the area of development is also absolutely essential.

The person in the local village wants to understand the value of what is going on. We have these national elections, which are all very nice, except where it happens is in a local village, a local hamlet.

Business of Supply

As a former municipal councillor and former president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, I can tell the House that the FCM has done a lot around in the world in terms of empowerment at the village level, which is absolutely essential.

People need to see new wells for clean water, a hydro-electric dam which will then actually bring electricity to a village, a clinic or a school where individuals who work in the clinic can be trained, whether they are cleaning the floors, doing the laundry or administering vaccinations. The whole program is all about substantive development at the village level.

We were pleased to see that the government, in support of the resolution, is prepared to put more emphasis on development because development is absolutely critical.

●(1215)

If we do not change the lives of people on the ground, it really does not matter about national elections if in fact the national government does not seem to be delivering on the ground at the local level. This is why of course things like training the national Afghan police are critical in terms of being able to hold that area as well. So, it has to be more than military. There has to be an emphasis on development. It needs to be more accountable.

In terms of CIDA, as we know, Afghanistan has become the number one recipient of Canadian aid. Yet, we have had difficulty in the past getting both the previous minister and this minister to account in terms of where the actual money is going, what is the status of many of these projects, and what is actually happening on the ground.

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to co-host with my colleague from British Columbia the international Red Cross committee based in Afghanistan which talked about the kinds of projects that are successfully being delivered, why they are important, how we are evaluating these projects and what kind of benchmarks we are setting to ensure that in fact these things are happening.

That is something which people want to see, both at home and abroad. They want to see that we are being successful. And so, part of that again is changing the end date, and being more than military. That is something that this side has emphasized very strongly in this House over the last year and a half.

I want to speak about the issue of training of the national Afghan army. We know that when we train people, sometimes we are going to obviously train them outside the wire. There has been some debate about how these troops would respond if they were fired upon. We do not intend, and it has never been our intent, to hamstring our soldiers on the ground in terms of being able to execute their responsibilities. There will be training. If fired upon, of course they would respond. This is not the situation where the UN handicapped former General Dallaire in Rwanda in 1993. We are not looking at that. We are looking at: if fired upon, obviously they would respond.

However, the major focus is obviously training, not just training in terms of the national Afghan police being able to do their job or for the army being able to do their job but also to have the confidence of people on the ground who are there to be protected. So, that is important.

Again, it is the reorientation of this mission which we have argued for. Reorientation also means rotation. I am pleased to see that the government is finally using that word and understanding that rotating means that others will have to come in.

In the resolution we talked about sufficient forces coming in. The government has talked about 1,000 troops. I am still not clear as to this magical number of 1,000, but I can tell members, again going back to that 3D report of Department of National Defence, that military superiority on the ground is not going to win. Eventually, it is going to be national reconciliation. But in terms of having more troops on the ground to assist us in terms of protecting our flanks, this is absolutely critical.

Again, our continuation is based on ensuring that there is protection for our forces who are there and also to continue with the provincial reconstruction team and development on the ground.

With regard to medium lift clarity, the government has indicated that it will not go forward without medium lift. We certainly agree with that. Again, because of the conditions on the ground at times, it is unsafe to move. We unfortunately had Canadian casualties and deaths because of a \$10.00 device that blows up a million-dollar vehicle. Therefore, the ability to move troops by air is absolutely essential and, therefore, medium lift. However, this should have been requested over a year ago by the government.

We have a situation, at the 11th hour, where with the NATO meetings in Bucharest coming up the first week of April, we still do not have answers with regard to that. That is a very sad commentary about NATO in general, that no one has stepped up to say they are going to offer the appropriate airlift that we need.

●(1220)

A balance is obviously required and, again, we go back to the issue of defence, diplomacy and development. We have argued all along that this is more than military. It has to be about concrete development with clear benchmarks for Canadians, so that they will know where the money is going, and they will be able to say these are the success stories and we can now move this along.

There is no question that we have, both in the House and certainly in the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, been seized with the Afghan issue. An array of speakers have come before the standing committee. They have had various viewpoints but all of them agree that this mission cannot be simply a military force on the ground and that this is certainly not Canada's mission alone.

We need to ensure that we deal with issues such as the narcotics economy, the issue of poppies, and how we deal with the situation where farmers get money for poppy crops. They are eventually developed into products such as opium and of course land on the streets in Canada and other countries around the world. We need an effective strategy to assist our Afghan partners in ensuring that other types of crops can be developed that will be lucrative for those farmers.

Business of Supply

We need to have accountability to Parliament. Liberals have argued, and the resolution stresses it very strongly, that the government, particularly the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of National Defence and the Minister of International Cooperation, reports back on a regular basis to parliamentarians. Ultimately, it is Parliament and Parliament's will that is essential in understanding what is going on. We need those updates on a regular basis and Liberals have called for it.

In the resolution we have also called on the government to support the fact that departments have to talk to each other. Instead of silos, which unfortunately we are often famous for in Ottawa, National Defence, Foreign Affairs and CIDA need to talk to each other and be on the same page in understanding where we are in Afghanistan. That is absolutely essential.

There is the issue of cooperation. We, on this side of the House as well as the government because of the resolution, are going to have to work much more effectively and closely with our allies on the ground in terms of diplomatic issues and development. These are essential in order to improve the life of the average person in Afghanistan.

The Liberals chose today to debate this topic for another day in the House because it is important for all colleagues to be able to hear their say so people will understand the various issues prior to whenever the vote is taken on the issue of 2011. We have some clarity now from the government on 2011. There is still the issue of why the July date and we need to have that dealt with.

As for accountability, reporting to parliamentarians is critical. This is something Canadians have stressed. People need to be reminded that this debate should not even be occurring now. Had the government taken the actions that the Liberals had called for over a year and a half ago about rotation after the April 2006 vote, we would not be in the situation now, with less than a year to go until the end of February 2009, and having this debate.

Of course, the other question is: What happens in Bucharest? The government has made it very clear, and Liberals certainly concur, that unless certain conditions I have outlined are met, the mission will have to end totally in February 2009 simply because the conditions need to be met.

There is certainly agreement in the chamber on the fact that, without the conditions, we are not prepared to move ahead. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of International Cooperation all realize that we have to have those conditions not only for our soldiers and CIDA workers on the ground but in general.

If NATO is serious about making sure that this mission is successful, and there is much debate and discussion as to not providing the same resources it did in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time, without that kind of support, the mission is not going to be successful.

• (1225)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege and an honour to speak in this debate today.

I do have a question for my hon. colleague across the way. This kind of reminds me of a lot of the rhetoric that we heard on the budget. I am happy to hear the member say he is going to support the extension of the mission to 2011. It has taken a while, but the opposition has finally come to its senses and has recognized that this is the logical and right thing to do. I am glad to hear those members are supporting this. Although my colleague is trying to invent a few reasons as to why he is opposed to it, at the end of the day he is still going to support it.

Could the member tell me, in his opinion, why the members of the NDP and the members of the Bloc are basically opposed to anything and everything? Maybe that is why they will never form a government. They talk about pulling our troops out of Afghanistan and sending them to Darfur, where not even the people we would be trying to help really and truly want them. That government does not want our troops there and it has said that even peacekeepers will be slaughtered. Why do those members continue down that road?

I would like to hear the member speak a bit more about the safety, et cetera, of the compound in Afghanistan. I have talked to numerous soldiers who have come back from there. If that member has not done so, I suggest that he do. With all due respect, I take their comments above even those of my Prime Minister and my defence minister, because those soldiers have been there. They have "seen that, done that", as the old saying goes. We have to talk to these people.

Let me get back to my question about the compound. If we do not protect and secure the area around it, our young men and women are going to be like sitting ducks. Why does the member not seem to realize that security is not necessarily combat? I would like him to comment on the fact that we have not lost a soldier in Afghanistan to actual hand to hand combat in over a year, although I am not sure of the exact date. I think that says something. It is a different kind of warfare in Afghanistan. I would like to hear the member's comments.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: First, Mr. Speaker, I would point out to my hon. colleague that we are not agreeing to extend the mission in its present form. What we did agree to is that the mission must change, it must end and it must be more than military. Again, I want to point out to the member that this could have been done a long time ago, but unfortunately there was not the political will on the other side to do so.

However, there is no question that when it comes to this mission, the mission will not be the same as it presently is. I emphasize that very strongly.

As for the troops on the ground, having been to Afghanistan, I can say about speaking to troops on the ground and to troops who have come home that it makes a certain impact on a person. I am the son of a former World War II combat soldier who was a foot soldier. We all know that foot soldiers obviously are the ones who do the real heaving lifting, or at least that is what my father always told me. When they got into tough situations, the infantry came in.

These people put their lives on the line every day. Whether they are in actual hand to hand combat, securing a compound, or training, they are in a war zone. We certainly understand that when we get off the plane there and have our helmets and our flak jackets on and people are there to ensure that we get back home.

Business of Supply

At the time the Minister of Foreign Affairs, a member of the New Democratic Party and I were there, people wanted to make sure that we all got home. When we are there, we are seized by that fact. In the middle of the night when rockets come in, we know that we are clearly in a war zone. Thus, while we want to emphasize these other aspects of diplomacy and development, which are absolutely critical, we believe that for this mission to succeed all aspects have to be dealt with.

On the issue of the New Democratic Party or the Bloc, it is really not up to me to comment. I think all members of the House support our troops regardless of whether they agree with the change in this mission or whatever. They obviously have to answer for themselves, but I think all members of the House certainly support our troops on the ground. I know that for a fact. What I do know, though, is that the approaches that some of the parties are taking are different. They obviously will have to account for those approaches, just as we have to account for the approach we have taken.

However, I certainly agree with the member: we want to make sure that when our forces are there, they are all well protected. We do realize that even in training they may be exposed to attack from time to time. At the end of the day, we do not intend to handicap them. As I say, we have seen that happen before and it certainly has had tragic results, particularly in Rwanda.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address the House, and I would like to inform you that I will share my time with the hon. Minister of International Cooperation.

I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak to the House today about Canada's role in Afghanistan. Last week, as you know, I attended a meeting of NATO's foreign affairs ministers in Brussels. My NATO counterparts and I had very productive and constructive talks. We discussed several issues, including NATO deployed operations and partnerships. We discussed the situation in Afghanistan and the NATO-led mission there. One of the main objectives of this meeting was to present the measures our government is taking in response to the recommendations made by the panel led by Canada's former foreign affairs minister, Mr. Manley.

I informed my colleagues of Canada's conditions for continuing the mission in Afghanistan after February 2009. First, we need to secure a partner that will provide a battle group of approximately 1,000 to support our efforts in Kandahar. Second, I told my counterparts that we need better equipment for our troops, such as medium-lift helicopters and high performance unmanned aerial vehicles. We would need this equipment and the troops before February 2009. I hope—and I am optimistic—that we will be able to find a partner in the coming weeks.

The equipment and troop requirements have been made clear to our allies, and I can say that they were very receptive to our objectives. They understand how important this mission is to NATO, and they understand how important this mission is to our country. I would like to assure my colleagues, the members of this House, that the mission in Afghanistan is our government's top priority.

The mission of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan demonstrates that NATO can play a significant role in establishing peace and security outside of the Euro-Atlantic region. Forty countries, including Canada, are participating in the international force's UN-mandated, NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. In addition to 26 NATO member countries, 14 other European and Asian countries are participating.

Why are we taking part in this mission? This is a legitimate question, and I would like to answer it today: we think that countries like Canada have a role to play on the international stage. Together with over 60 countries and international organizations, Canada is in Afghanistan as part of a UN-mandated mission to build a stable, democratic and self-sufficient society.

Two years ago, the United Nations, the Afghan government and members of the international community, including Canada, adopted the Afghanistan Compact. The purpose of the compact is to improve coordination between the Afghan government and governments in the international community. It provides direction for our involvement and details results, benchmarks, deadlines and mutual obligations in three specific areas: security; governance, rule of law and human rights, of course; and economic and social development. What this really means—and we have heard this many times—is that there can be no development without security.

● (1235)

Conversely, security will not last if development does not progress, bringing better roads, improved access to health care and education, and significant economic opportunities for Afghans. Access to more opportunities will encourage the Afghan people to take control of their country's stability and prosperity.

Let us not fool ourselves: this is a major challenge for Canada and the international community. Despite the difficulties, we must not lose sight of the progress we have made over the past few years.

For example, nearly six million children are now attending school, while under the Taliban regime, only 700,000 children went to school, and sadly, none of them were girls.

[*English*]

As a result of the wide-ranging international efforts there, Afghanistan has been able to begin to rebuild itself. The security we are helping to create is vital for this process of reconstruction. Every day the Canadian Forces and others work to create security in Afghanistan.

Last week, all hon. members of the House saw another measure of progress in Afghanistan. I refer to the recent visit of female Afghan parliamentarians to Ottawa. As the Prime Minister has observed, these brave women are fighting to change the history of their country. Their lives are on the line every day. These women know what a return to the rule by the extremist brutal Taliban would mean. Canadians should be proud that our country is backing up these brave women, our men and women in uniform, our diplomats and our aid workers, all helping Afghanistan rebuild itself.

Business of Supply

Yes, our presence is needed in Afghanistan. That is why our government believes Parliament should approve the extension of our military mission in Kandahar. We are making a real positive difference in Afghanistan. We are demonstrating to Afghans and to our allies that Canada is a reliable partner in the quest for global security.

Parliamentarians also demonstrated that resolve in 2006. I refer to when the House voted for a two year extension of the mission. The end of the mandate is approaching and so the House will have to reach a decision on what comes next.

Our government has already been clear. We believe Canada should live up to its international obligations and commitments. We are optimistic that the majority of the members of the House will support our position. It is based on principle. It is based on a clear assessment of our international obligations.

We introduced a revised motion on February 21. It acknowledges what is required for Canada's mission to succeed in Afghanistan. It reiterates our commitment to the UN mandate on Afghanistan, but it also affirms that our commitment is not open-ended. It commits our government to notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in Kandahar as of July 2011. We would complete redeployment from the south by December of that year.

We believe this is a reasonable compromise. We believe it addresses the important questions Canadians have about the future of the mission. It is a clear and principled position. Our NATO allies must know where Canada stands. The government and people of Afghanistan must also know. We must also ensure our troops on the ground know where Canada stands. They deserve no less than this.

● (1240)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what the minister had to say and I would like to ask him a question.

He went to a NATO meeting. There will be other NATO meetings. I, too, often go to those meetings. One thing we have often heard in this House concerning the mission and the policy of the three Ds is that far too much emphasis is being placed on defence, and not enough on development and diplomacy. However, the minister and his government were quick to embrace the Manley report. That report mentions not only extending the mission, but also sending an additional 1,000 soldiers and pilotless aircraft. It says nothing—or almost nothing—about construction and diplomacy.

Why does the minister continue to pursue a military approach? Why did he not use his presence at the NATO meetings as an opportunity to ask other NATO countries to replace Canada in southern Afghanistan, since that is where we are paying the heaviest price?

The minister failed in his duty. He should have told the NATO countries that we have done our part, that we have lost 79 soldiers, that it has been incredibly costly for us to remain in the south and that it is now time for another country to do its part. But he did not do so and continues to pursue a military approach instead of moving towards a better rotation of everyone who should be working together in Afghanistan.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to reaffirm that the Afghanistan mission is multi-faceted. To ensure economic development and to help the Afghan people we must establish security and stability in that country. Our Canadian Forces and NATO allies are there for that purpose.

I would like to repeat for my colleague that the Government of Canada will invest more than \$1 billion through 2011 to ensure, and rightly so, basic economic development for the Afghans. This development cannot take place without first providing security.

As I mentioned in my speech, after economic development we must ensure that Afghans are able to take their future in hand. That is why, until 2011, we will train the Afghan army and police so that they can be responsible for their own sovereignty and security.

I also would like to remind my colleague that, at the end of this year, we will have more than 65 civilians in Afghanistan assisting the army. We will have high-level active civilians with experience in international aid. My colleague, the Minister of International Cooperation will be speaking more about development next.

● (1245)

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for presenting the government's case to Parliament. There is the question of what is actual, reliable, honest-to-goodness foreign policy and what the government seems to have put forward. On the ground, security is down, civilian deaths are up, poppy production is up and corruption is up. It seems the government believes the prescription for that is more troops, drones and helicopters.

The government is probably going to get its 1,000 troops. I think it knew that before it came to the House, with the Liberals, to extend the war to 2011. If those troops come from the United States, whose command and control will those soldiers be under? Will they be under Canadian command and control or will they be under American command and control and will it be Operation Enduring Freedom or will it be part of ISAF?

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear it is a UN mission, but under NATO command. We are working with our allies to ensure that we provide security in Afghanistan. I know the hon. member is going to have the privilege this afternoon, after question period, to hear from the Minister of National Defence about the things we are doing there.

Everyone knows it is a challenging situation in Kandahar, but we have to do the job. We are there. We have a commitment and we will finish the job. To finish the job and to succeed, we need 1,000 troops. I am optimistic that in the near future we will have those troops and we will be able to succeed in Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, just provided an overview of Canada's commitment to NATO in Afghanistan. He explained how the Afghanistan Compact guides international efforts in three areas: security, development and governance.

[English]

As members know, six female Afghan parliamentarians joined us in Ottawa during International Women's Week. They, above all, know how important security, development and governance is to their country.

Over the week, they expressed their gratitude for Canada's presence in Afghanistan and strongly stressed how important it was for Canada to stay the course. Each day they live in the reality that is Afghanistan and recognize that without security there can be no development.

Each is a woman of courage and determination and the roots of their commitment are founded in their personal stories. They serve as politicians with their lives under threat and under onerous conditions. One told of how her husband and children were killed by the insurgents, and yet they are willing to serve in public life, to see a better future for the Afghan people. They told me of their fears of what would happen if the 60 nations, which are working to bring stability to their people, were to abandon Afghanistan prematurely.

Like all mothers around the world, they want peace and stability. One spoke of her 11-month-old baby. She said what she wanted most was a good education for her children. They know already that in only six years, millions of children are now going to school. However, they also know thousands of other children are seeking the same opportunity. That is why Canada is the largest donor to the biggest education initiative of the Afghan government. They said that it was important for Canada to continue supporting the training of female teachers to teach young girls, who under the Taliban were denied formal education.

The Afghan women were grateful that maternal deaths had been reduced and that infants were now surviving beyond their fifth birthdays. They know Canada is helping to ensure that women and their children are being vaccinated to fight diseases like polio, tetanus and malaria.

They told me how women were now starting their own small businesses with the help of the microfinancing program supported by Canada and how this was bringing more financial independence to these enterprising women.

They know Canadian-supported literacy training for women means improved nutrition and health care for their children and families.

As parliamentarians, these women had a special appreciation of the work Canada was doing to ensure that Afghan women had access to their rights and protection from abuse and violence under the law. During the Taliban regime, the women of Afghanistan were more often the victims of violence and oppression. They said that there

were now stronger protection laws for Afghan women and asked for increased access to legal aid.

Canada is supporting the new Afghanistan independent human rights commission, which promotes human rights and monitors and investigates violations. This is why we will continue to support projects that strengthen the institutions of good governance and a strong justice system. Through an experienced organization, Canada has supported the training of prosecutors and judges.

For all these reasons, the Afghan parliamentarians are grateful to Canada for its work and support that has brought about a real difference in their lives.

On behalf of the Afghan people, they outlined what more they knew had yet to be accomplished. We must listen to these women and continue in our work in Afghanistan, and we will. We will do it effectively so the Afghan people see positive changes in their lives.

CIDA now has over 20 persons on the ground in Afghanistan. We have plans to increase that number to 35 this year. I will be delegating more authority to those in the field. CIDA also has a quick response program to support initiatives that meet local needs as they arise. These steps will mean that we are able to act more quickly and be more responsive to situations on the ground.

● (1250)

CIDA officials in Afghanistan, working with our security personnel, will make decisions on their movements in the field without having to receive clearance from headquarters here in Canada. This will mean that those who can assess the security situation on the ground are actually making the decision on the movement of our CIDA personnel.

We are currently doing our due diligence to identify projects that will bring more awareness of Canada's presence in Afghanistan. Such a project will have to meet the needs of the Afghan people, be able to be executed efficiently and accountably, and be sustainable, as well as being in accord with the aims of the Afghan government.

We will ensure regular reports are available to Canadians of the development progress being made. We will continue to work to increasing donor coordination among our partner countries, aid agencies and NGOs to achieve greater effectiveness.

Much has been accomplished, but there is still much to be done. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. There is still a great humanitarian need through much of the country. Afghans face the obstacles of poverty, receive limited basic health care services and need to rebuild their infrastructure for clean water, roads and industry.

That is why Canada has provided support to the world food program, delivering food to those facing a severe winter and rising food prices.

With the World Health Organization, Canada has enabled access to basic health care and immunization programs for hundreds of thousands of children and women.

Business of Supply

With Canada's support, communities are being rebuilt. Through over 12,000 village councils, local projects have reconstructed bridges, roads and irrigation canals. These are real results that are making a difference today and will mean a stronger future tomorrow.

Canada is a part of the United Nations effort. On the invitation of a democratically elected government, Canada is working to bring a brighter future to Afghan women and to that ravaged country.

Sustainable Afghan institutions, its government and its public sector must develop the capacity to deliver good governance, the rule of law and basic human rights to their own people. Afghan parliamentarians recognize this and are grateful for the sacrifice of Canadians in rebuilding their country.

The women of Afghanistan know that the international effort is making a difference for them, their families, their children and their communities. Last week, women in Afghanistan celebrated International Women's Day because they can see how their lives are changing. As mothers, wives, caregivers, employers and employees, as teachers and politicians, Afghan women do not want to return to life under oppression and violence.

The Afghan people are a strong, proud and determined people who know that with the return of a safe and secure country they can succeed. With Canada's continued support, they will achieve their vision of a strong, free and prosperous nation. By supporting the motion before the House, Canada can do its part.

• (1255)

[Translation]

I encourage all members of this House to support the government motion.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have been in Kandahar, Afghanistan, for several years now, and for a month and a half we have been searching for 1,000 new troops to support the mission in Afghanistan. In that month and a half, it has proven to be so difficult to find people to assist us that I am wondering if anyone else will want to replace us if we stay in Afghanistan until 2011. We are not even able to get the UN to send new troops to help us, so imagine what will be the case when we leave in 2011. I do not know what will happen.

What does the minister think will happen if we do not find the 1,000 troops we need by February 2009? Indeed, we are having a hard time finding them.

Can the minister also talk about the schools that have been built with the money of Canadians and Quebeckers since Canada has been in Afghanistan? Furthermore, of the schools we have built, how many are still in use?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Speaker, in reply to the question from the member of the opposition, I must tell members that progress is being made. As we heard today, and as I spoke about, the people of Afghanistan are seeing an actual difference.

I will quote from what was reported just this weekend. Women in Afghanistan were celebrating International Women's Day and, as they said, every year "is better than last year and the year before last

year". As was said, "Every day the women's life becomes a little better".

We are making progress. We are seeing more children going to school and more infants surviving their birth and living to beyond five years of age.

We know that progress is being made and we also know that this month there will be 2,000 additional American troops to support our Canadian efforts in Afghanistan, and we have been talking about offers of assistance from various countries, not only with the Minister of National Defence but our Minister of Foreign Affairs and myself as well. We have countries coming forward and helping with Canada's efforts in Afghanistan.

As far as the schools are concerned, let me tell members that we have hundreds of schools being built and millions of children going to school. We have children who want to come to school but are not able to because we need to ensure that they are safe and secure.

• (1300)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): We have two minutes left. I would like to give a chance to two MPs to ask questions. That means 30 seconds each.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the minister. Mr. Manley said in his report that Canada should be doing "signature" projects that would be easily promoted in Canada.

We also know that as an aid project the military has been building roads that seem to support the military operations, but Oxfam says that what has not been done are local projects that build community capabilities to solve problems, reduce violence, enhance resistance to militants and strengthen community coherence, and that this is a major project toward peace.

Could the minister tell us what kinds of projects at the very local level Canada is supporting?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The minister has 30 seconds.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Speaker, the number of projects that we have accomplished will take more than 30 seconds to talk about. What we ensure is that the projects, whether they are delivered by the military or our aid workers, are in the best interests of the Afghan people and the local community.

Our roads not only ensure the safety of travel along that road for the military, who are delivering aid supplies and helping our aid workers reach projects, they are also the roads that the farmers use to take their produce to market. They are also the roads that the families use to visit other—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question will be quick and simple.

Business of Supply

The motion states that this would be on the express condition that there is more transparency and true accountability.

How can the government reassure Canadians and Quebecers that it will actually implement this, so we can really be sure before members vote?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Speaker, as I told the House, and as I have told the public as well through technical briefings, CIDA is taking actual steps. We have committed to regular reports on the progress being made. We have increased the number of CIDA personnel on the ground who can visit sites and projects. We will ensure that there is more accountability by working with greater coherence and coordination with our partners and our NGOs. We have responded to every recommendation in the Manley report that is related to development.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in the debate on Afghanistan today.

I often listen to ministers of the Crown and soldiers in uniform speaking. There is a marked difference when the uniforms come off. There are two perspectives on what is happening on the ground. The ministers of the Crown and the generals tell us that everything is going very well. General Atkinson is one of the officers who give us regular briefings. Unfortunately, it is impossible to find out what is going on with the schools, the wells or the irrigation systems. He always tells us that something really good has happened, that they have built a bridge. The other day, he showed us photos of a bridge from many different angles. Supposedly, army engineers worked on that bridge. From time to time, they show us things like that.

The ministers of the Crown have been telling us the same thing over and over since 2001. They say that we are going into Afghanistan to build schools so that children, especially little girls, can go back to school, to ensure security, and to re-establish agriculture in some way, with irrigation wells. We know what is going on with agriculture at the moment: opium is about the only crop for sale. In short, the ministers of the Crown and the generals who are passing along the information must be wearing rose-coloured glasses.

Later, I will explain the Bloc Québécois' parliamentary approach. Some people like to point out that at various times over the years, the member for Saint-Jean said this, or the Bloc Québécois leader said that. Later on, I will explain that the Bloc Québécois has been guided in its actions by a consistent, logical approach.

Let us come back to what is happening on the ground. It is inaccurate to say that everything is going well. We have other sources of information. We read the newspapers. Reporters regularly go into the field. For example, two weeks ago, the *Globe and Mail* ran an absolutely disheartening report on what is happening in Afghanistan. No one is talking about that here. Yet what was described in this analysis was terrible. We also get information from major international organizations like the Red Cross, Amnesty International and the Senlis Council. There are many groups in the field that are giving us a completely different picture than the government and Canada's senior military officers.

Let us look at what some of these organizations are saying, because the famous Manley report refers to them. I was talking earlier about the report with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Bloc never hid the fact that it did not appreciate this panel. We believe that the House of Commons was quite capable of creating a committee of members of the different parties in the House, which could have made a recommendation to the government. Naturally, being in a minority position, the government was afraid to entrust this task to a committee of the House. It decided that the committee's report might not contain the things it wanted to hear.

The Manley report tells the government exactly what it wants to hear. I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs about this earlier. Why is everyone in the House, regardless of their party affiliation, saying that this mission is unbalanced? What the government has retained from the Manley report is that Canada should extend the mission and add 1,000 soldiers and that helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles are needed. Once again, everything has to do with the military. That is why we denounced the Manley report as soon as it was released.

For months and even years, we have been demanding that the mission be rebalanced, but the government is jumping on the Manley report and saying that we have to add 1,000 soldiers and deploy helicopters and unmanned planes, supposedly to conduct surveillance day and night and see exactly what is happening. We feel that the Manley report is far from definitive, and we said we did not agree with it.

With regard to the major issues involved, we often hear about the three D policy: development, defence and diplomacy. The minister is telling us that she has sent more people into the field. When I went to Kandahar barely two years ago, there were 2,500 soldiers to handle defence, six people from CIDA and six people from Foreign Affairs.

● (1305)

That was nowhere close to a balance. I am not saying that there should be 2,500 people from CIDA and another 2,500 in the diplomatic corps, but there is a limit. We are told that big efforts were made and, as a result, their numbers have now risen to 20 and are likely to reach 35.

Before addressing diplomacy and development, I will start by focusing my remarks on governance. Reference is often made to the Afghanistan Compact. An important element of that compact was actually governance. Do members know what President Karzai is called in Afghanistan? He is referred to as the "mayor of Kabul". That is because, without international support, he cannot extend his influence and authority beyond the country's capital. The two *Globe and Mail* reporters I mentioned earlier said they were not even sure that he was still the "mayor of Kabul". Some might say that he is the master of his castle, where he has dug himself in because the roadblocks put up by factions, warlords and corrupt police pretty much encircle Kabul, which means that anyone who has to drive out of Kabul encounters a roadblock. I am not the one saying this.

Business of Supply

When we travelled to Afghanistan, we were not allowed out of the camp in Kandahar. We had to insist that reporters relay to Canada the message that we were prisoners in our own camp in Kandahar. We wanted to go out and visit schools, dispensaries, hospitals, irrigation systems and water wells that allegedly had been dug, but were told we could not leave the camp for security reasons. That is odd, because, when Conservative MPs travel there, they can be seen outside the camp mingling with little children or going down streets in Kabul. They are seen visiting many kinds of sites, but we were not allowed to. That is something else.

The Manley report calls for transparency. This is not complicated. The government and the generals who give us briefing sessions are not being transparent. There is propaganda in what they give us, and everything is designed to show us that everything is just fine, when that is not what our sources are telling us. As well, our own physical presence tells us that they do not want to show us those things. Why do they not want to show them to us? Is it really for some security reason or is it because there is nothing to show? That is the problem. Otherwise, the media would be happy to show us these fine hospitals, clinics and schools that supposedly exist. They are not able to do it, because there are none. That is what we have been speaking out against for a long time, and that is why we want to rebalance this mission.

Everyone says that it must not be military, that there is too much emphasis on the military aspect. The first thing the government does after the Manley report is submitted is increase the number of troops yet again. It says virtually nothing about development and diplomacy.

Let us talk about development now. I have said a little about it. There are no schools, it is as simple as that. We also have a major criticism. When we were in Kandahar, I put these questions to people who are working on the ground. They told us not only that there are no schools, but that there is no longer any accountability to CIDA, something that is even more serious.

We are always being told that Canada will be giving a billion dollars to Afghanistan. Sure. Someone can go and see one of the six CIDA staffers and tell them he has an idea: he wants to dig a well in his village 500 km from Kabul or Kandahar. CIDA will tell him this is a good idea because there is no water in the village and will ask him how much money will be needed. He will reply: \$15,000. So the cheque will be signed, but we learned on site—we, members of Parliament—that it costs about \$1,000 to \$2,000 to build a well. And yet a cheque for \$15,000 has been signed. In addition, no one will go to the village in question to see whether the well has been dug. Billions of dollars are fine, but money is flowing like water over there. We hear about roads. Gravel is needed to build roads. We learned over there that the gravel used to build the road we were told about normally costs \$5 a tonne, and yet a tonne of gravel is being sold to the Canadians for \$80. That is how it works.

It is unfortunate that I could not question the minister, but that is how it is. There is virtually no accountability. So that money is not going to the people at the grassroots, it is going to the people who already have assets, like the warlords, who are getting rich off Canada's contributions.

● (1310)

We can be told that everything is fine only for so long.

Diplomacy fell by the wayside when a Canadian diplomat was killed early on. It is not complicated. There are jirgas in the villages. Diplomats do not go there. Soldiers are the ones who go and sit down with village elders to ask them what can be done and to engage in dialogue.

Imagine if, the next day, the village is bombed or there is a shoot-out and 6,000 civilians are killed. The next day, army personnel return to sit down with village elders and ask them what they can do, if they can give them Joe Louis cakes, cookies and little backpacks for the children. Well, that is not what is needed. What is needed is real diplomacy, meetings with the governor, with President Karzai, in order to ensure that diplomacy prevails over the military aspect.

We also often hear about international diplomacy. In the case of the countries surrounding Afghanistan, it is important that Canadian diplomats meet with representatives from Iran, Pakistan, China, India and Russia, who all have something to say on the matter. That is not what is happening. That is not what the Manley report suggests. That was not what sparked the interest of the government. Rather, it was the question of adding more soldiers and military equipment. As for the rest, the government says that we will wait, because everyone knows that if there is no security in Afghanistan—we hear this all the time—there can be no development or diplomacy.

Well, this is not working. The insurrection is gaining strength. We are losing control of the territory. Perhaps four or five times more soldiers are needed, yet NATO and other countries do not wish to mobilize any more. I will talk more about this a little later.

With regard to defence, I believe that I have expressed my point of view. We have 2,500 soldiers in Afghanistan. I wish to state that we have nothing against the troops. I trained with the soldiers of the Royal 22e Régiment and was deployed with them to Bosnia in 2001. They do an excellent job. They do what they are ordered to do, and that is fight. Everyone here says that that is not the solution. However, we have 2,500 soldiers in Afghanistan, plus logistics support, who are fighting. Even General Richards, whom I met down there and who is responsible for all of Afghanistan, said that it did not make sense. We suggested that he tell his superiors. It is all well and good to tell NATO; someone must realize that we cannot continue with the military plan. And yet it is continuing, and this government is going forward.

A while ago, I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to press NATO on the rotation issue; however, he did not. Instead, he is ensuring that we stay in Afghanistan until 2011. That is what will happen. Additional soldiers will be mobilized. Another nation—we do not know which one yet—will mobilize them. Personally, I am convinced that this has already been decided. The government would certainly not impose this condition if it knew in advance that it would not be met.

Business of Supply

I think they are playing games and they want to make us believe that it is difficult. Discussions are already underway with representatives from France, who may send their troops to the south. However, if the French do not wish to send their troops to the south because they are more comfortable with the Americans, the latter will be sent instead. That is what will happen in the end. They have probably already agreed to the helicopters and the UAVs, the unmanned aerial vehicles.

The government will tell us that all the conditions have been met. However, these conditions are not conducive to success. These conditions also include diplomacy and development. If we do not have that, we could have a million soldiers, we could be monitoring every village in Afghanistan, and we would not succeed in earning the trust of the Afghans or in re-establishing governance by having soldiers in every village of Afghanistan.

We have been saying this for a long time now, but no one ever listens. This is what is happening: not only are there no schools and clinics, but we are told that opium trafficking is fuelling terrorism, and I agree. In fact, since Canada has been there, this has continued—and is on the rise. Afghanistan now provides 90% of the world's heroin supply.

I travelled with the Germans to Fayzabad, in the north, and to Kandahar. In Fayzabad, travelling by jeep with the German army, we saw poppy fields everywhere, indeed everywhere. No one is addressing this matter and those who want to deal with it propose eradication. That is precisely what should not be done; the Afghans need to be offered another type of crop, but that is not being done.

• (1315)

The British and the Americans want to spray the fields and completely destroy the poppies. The poor farmer whose family's survival depends on those poppy fields will see his crop disappear. When he wonders what to do next, now that he is left with nothing, the Taliban will offer him protection, assurance and food. In exchange, he or one of his sons will have to take up arms from time to time, since the Taliban needs that type of help. That is what will happen.

In fact, that is what is happening and will happen in years to come. There is not enough vision to come up with another solution. And yet, solutions exist. I even heard that NATO may enter into discussions with the European Union to ensure that the new crops to be developed in Afghanistan will have new markets, for instance, in Europe, a continent that is not far from Afghanistan. I heard mention of that, but then I did not hear any more about it. It is over. Now we are into eradication.

By all accounts, the strategy being used in Afghanistan will not resolve the issue.

I was also surprised in Fayzabad when the Germans told me it was 8 p.m. and they had to return to camp. I asked if it was because they were supposed to go and have supper but they said they had orders not to be out after 8 p.m. It is very strange. Our soldiers in the south are patrolling day and night. So a lot of things are unfair. When I went to the Bundestag in Germany to tell them that, they said they could not introduce it before their Parliament for fear of being

defeated if they allowed their soldiers to be out after 8 p.m. It really is unjust.

As is now policy here in the House of Commons, the Conservatives have twisted the mission, as I say over and over. This mission was supposed to be focused on diplomacy and development, but that is no longer true. It is almost entirely a defence mission.

For a whole year the Liberal Party carried the standard for those who wanted to end the operations in February 2009 but now they have surrendered and gone over to the Conservatives. That is terribly disappointing.

The NDP also has its faults. At just about this time last year, a decision had to be made on ceasing military operations in 2009. The Liberal Party voted in favour, as did the Bloc Québécois. To our great surprise, the NDP joined forces with the Conservatives and voted against.

So here we are now facing an extension of the mission, when if the NDP had just been willing to end combat operations in 2009, we would be packing our bags and it would all be over. They took an ideological stance, voting against the motion because it did not propose to withdraw our troops immediately. Here we are now in a worse position with a mission that will no longer end in 2009 but 2011.

We in the Bloc Québécois have been very consistent. Some people told me that I said this and that on this or that date. I want to correct the record. On October 8, 2001, we supported the mission to Afghanistan. On January 28, 2002, we supported it again after further discussions in the House. On November 15, 2005, we supported the new deployment outside Kabul.

That was when we started laying down conditions. The longer things dragged on, the tougher our conditions became. On May 16, 2006, the Bloc Québécois proposed a motion in a session of the Standing Committee on National Defence. We had been asking the government for a long time to change things and it did not want to. We proposed a motion, therefore, asking it to tell us how much longer the mission would last, what the state of our troops and equipment was, what proportion of the mission was combat and what proportion reconstruction, and what the evaluation criteria were. The next day, the Conservative government introduced the motion to extend the mission until 2009 without answering any of our questions. That was when we started to say we were finished with all this.

Our positions have always been very logical. We have always been responsible. We took these positions on the basis of the information available to us at the time.

I will conclude by saying that we were in perfect sync with the desires of the Quebec people. The Conservatives, Liberals and NDP will find us in their path in Quebec during the election campaign.

• (1320)

We will tell Quebeckers who was there for them, who listened to them, who is defending their interests and values, and that is the Bloc Québécois.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while my colleague had a couple of good points, for the most part, truth and that member are ships passing in the night. Thank God that the real representatives from Quebec to the mission in Afghanistan are people in the Van Doos who deserve our credit and all the accolades we give them.

The member misrepresented many things. He presented the Senlis Council as having been a true spokes-group for what is going on but it clearly misled the defence committee on its activities over there.

The member said that there were no clinics and no schools. Is he calling the Department of National Defence a liar? Is he calling the Chief of Defence Staff a liar? Is he calling all Canadian Forces members, CIDA members and DFAIT members, who are in Afghanistan doing these things, liars?

The member talked about the ratio of 2,500 military personnel to 20 or so civilians and how that means the mission is imbalanced. Does he have any idea what those 2,500 military members are doing besides carrying arms and engaging the Taliban, as they must do? Does he have any idea who is building the bridges and the schools, who is operating the clinics, starting irrigation systems and turning on the electricity? It is a good portion of the 2,500 uniformed Canadian men and women. He clearly has his own agenda with respect to what he is presenting in the House today and that is very unfortunate.

I would like to ask the member a question about governance. He talked about the lack of progress, which, there is no question, is a challenge and always will be when we are building a country from the ground up. I think he knows about the strategic advisory team in Afghanistan. Could he give us his assessment on the work that SAT is doing in Kabul and whether he thinks it is a worthwhile contribution to the mission, bearing in mind that it is being done by men and women in uniform who are stepping outside of their normal combat-related duties to do things that involve reconstruction, development and capacity building? Does he have a comment on the work that SAT is doing in Kabul?

• (1325)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I cannot use the word “liar” because it is unparliamentary. I do have to say that the ministers of the Crown, this government and the military are distorting reality, and it may be in their best interest to do so. Propaganda has always been used as a military tactic and, in fact, the winner may well be the one with the best propaganda.

The SAT is a good example. What is the SAT? It is a strategic advisory team to President Karzai, and it is comprised of military officers. Again, that is symptomatic. In fact, it is an inconsistency within the government. Why have only the military advising President Karzai? Perhaps having a few people assigned to development and diplomacy on the team would help broaden the focus beyond an exclusively military vision. The SAT is doing a fine job, but if it included members from civilian teams, it would provide a much broader picture than the one this group of military advisors to the President of Afghanistan is providing.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his presentation last week, the parliamentary secretary told us that 4,000 schools had been built in Afghanistan since the Canadian soldiers arrived. According to our information, there was a time when only 6 of the 2,500 soldiers on the ground were assigned to reconstruction.

It is well known that the first casualty of war is the truth. I would like to congratulate the member for Saint-Jean on his speech and for his good work, and I would like to ask him if it is reasonable to believe that so much reconstruction work has been done over there by so few people, as the Conservatives claim.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas raises an excellent question. We are hearing more contradictions. Indeed, we recently heard the figure of 4,000 regarding schools. This afternoon, listening to the Minister of International Cooperation, she talked about a few hundred schools. We see that even the government has a hard time reconciling its resources and information. Many are then surprised that people like Bloc Québécois members, who want to pursue it even further and uncover the truth, throw their contradictions in their face. This is one of them.

Speaking of other aspects that I explained earlier, how is it that the members of the Standing Committee on National Defence, when they were in Kandahar, asked to see schools, clinics and other things that would be considered social and economic development, and their request was refused? We therefore concluded that it was probably because there are none. Thus, there are some contradictions in the government's discourse. Some people will even use propaganda, saying that there are 4,000 schools, even though the Minister of International Cooperation herself just told us there are a few hundred. That is indeed a contradiction.

[English]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I need to go back and correct my colleague. No one has ever said that there were six staff members doing the construction.

If he will listen very carefully I will say it once again. Out of the 2,500 uniformed men and women over there, the bulk of the work is being done by hundreds of members, not six members. Yes, six people could not build 4,000 schools, nor could the Canadians build those by themselves. That is the entire country.

Those members refuse to recognize that the mission in Afghanistan is not the entire country. They think it is just Kandahar but it is not just Kandahar. The mission across the entire country is very well balanced but it needs to be more toward development and reconstruction, which is the direction that we have been working along with our allies right from the start.

I would really appreciate if the hon. members would stop deliberately misrepresenting what is being said.

Business of Supply

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I think the government is the one misrepresenting the facts. Our information does not come from strictly government sources. The government has a role to play and it plays it well when it says that everything is great, everything is wonderful. This is the Parliament of Canada. Of course we are going to talk more about Kandahar. I could talk about the north, the west and the east, but Canadian troops are in the south, and they are the ones Parliament is responsible for. And this is very important. We no longer want to hear that we are against our troops when we are against the mission. We are against the mission. The soldiers over there must follow orders. They are following the orders of the Parliament of Canada. We are members of the Parliament of Canada, and it is our right to tell the government that it is on the wrong track and that we are headed towards a dead end. We said it once and we will say it again, and that is why the Bloc Québécois will rise on Thursday evening, unlike the Liberals, and vote against extending the mission until 2011.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week I attended a meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, where observers of the conflict in Afghanistan were telling a different story. What I heard made me further question the direction this government is taking with the mission in Afghanistan. The Manley report, for example, was described as entertaining—I do not know exactly what was said—instead of something that actually redirects the mission. This report was heavily criticized. If we keep going in this direction, nothing will be changed by 2011. There were two experts at the table, one who specializes in military disarmament and one who has worked for CIDA for over 15 years. There was also a retired soldier who said the same thing as my colleague, the Bloc's foreign affairs critic. It was said by various people.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I have the list of witnesses my colleague is referring to. They are highly qualified people. There was Rémi Landry, who often appears on Radio-Canada as a defence commentator, Ms. Peterson and Ms. Banerjee. These people are adding their voices to say that the picture in Afghanistan is not as rosy as we are led to believe. The Bloc Québécois has the most responsible, most balanced solution, as we will demonstrate on Thursday evening.

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity this morning to participate in the debate. We are dealing with a government motion, crafted by a Conservative-Liberal marriage of convenience, to extend the Kandahar counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan for three more years from the time when we find ourselves debating on this occasion.

I want to make reference to the acknowledgement, widely shared and widely expressed, that there is no military solution to the devastating problems that are plaguing the lives of people in Afghanistan today.

That is not a recent idea that has come from the New Democratic Party. It has been acknowledged repeatedly over a period of several years, including by members of the government, by the UN secretary

general, by the NATO secretary general and by the President of Afghanistan himself when he spoke in this place two years ago.

What does it mean to say that there is no military solution? It means that Afghanistan has serious political problems and that those problems can only be resolved through political solutions.

From the perspective of many people who have studied those problems, it requires that we shift from what is primarily a military counter-insurgency effort. The dollars that Canada expends and how we distribute those dollars indicates how overwhelmingly this is a military mission to which Canada has committed itself. We must shift on to what needs to be a comprehensive, complex peace-building mission.

Unfortunately, the Liberal modified Conservative motion, which we find ourselves debating today, simply fails to recognize that fact and all of the evidence that backs up that position.

The problem with the mission is not that more time is needed. We need to be clear that this motion would extend the military mission to 2011, three more years. The problem with the mission is that it is flawed and, because it is flawed, it is failing in some of the most fundamental ways that matter most to the people of Afghanistan.

I do not want to take all of my time to talk about the six courageous, articulate women members of Parliament from Afghanistan who were here visiting last week, but I too had the opportunity and I welcomed the opportunity to talk to those six members of Parliament from Afghanistan, as I have other members of Parliament from Afghanistan.

Yes, they understandably pleaded the case for Canadians not to turn their backs on the people of Afghanistan. I welcomed the opportunity to make it absolutely clear that it has never been the view of the Canadian people nor the New Democratic Party, as has been disgustingly suggested again and again by government members, to cut and run, one of the most vile terms that could possibly be used to characterize the view of Canadians and my party. As a representative of my party, I deeply resent that representation, not just because it came out of the mouth of George Bush and was immediately parroted by Conservative members of Parliament and now by Liberals, but because it is such a pathetic misrepresentation and distortion of what the view is, which is that there needs to be a comprehensive, robust, diplomatic effort if this series of political problems are to be solved and the people of Afghanistan will be able to get on a positive constructive course to build their lives.

• (1335)

One of the things that is deeply disturbing is the distortion that is created about the position we have consistently advocated. It does such a disservice. It is so insensitive to our troops who are serving as they have been asked to serve by their government in a mission not of their choosing and not of their creation, but one in which they respond to the call of duty. Our troops have never done otherwise. They have always served courageously and competently in carrying out the duties assigned to them.

Business of Supply

Clearly it needs to be recognized that NATO is not a diplomacy agency. NATO is a military alliance. It is not multilateralist military alliance either in any global sense or even regional sense that has any relevance to the region in which Afghanistan is located. NATO is primarily a war-fighting machine. It does not have the competence, mandate or experience to be involved in the kind of multilateralist mission to get us on a path to peace. That is why there is a growing crescendo of persons who are involved in the international development field who have long experience in peace building, in peace seeking and peacekeeping who say we need to shift that mission from one that is NATO led to one that is lodged within the purview of the United Nations.

The Manley panel itself identified again and again the lack of coordination that is taking place under the NATO umbrella. The problem with the Manley commission report, as I see it, is that much of its analysis and many of its conclusions were actually quite accurate. The difficulty is there was a huge gulf between the panel's analysis and conclusions, and the recommendations it made. Essentially the panel said that the approach is not working, that insecurity is becoming even more of a problem, that it is not coordinated, and let us do more of the same for another lengthy period of time. That is exactly what the Liberal-Conservative motion on the floor of this House today is prescribing.

It is time to acknowledge Afghanistan for what it really is. It is a conflict among Afghans and other regional actors. Our role is to find a way to contribute to ending that conflict, not prolonging it or, worse still, becoming a party on one side of the conflict. It requires a shift from the role of combatants on the front line in the so-called war on terror to peace support professionals in a dynamic interstate conflict that is in a multilateralist framework. That means reorienting the current strategy away from combat and toward a coordinated diplomatic, developmental and peace support mission.

In the absence of a concentrated political effort, coordination of the military, diplomatic and development strategies in Afghanistan has been severely hampered by internal divisions. This has been hampered by duplication and sometimes competing objectives in terms of various initiatives. This has been hampered by a failure to address Afghan's most pressing needs as outlined in the Afghanistan Compact. Canada must channel its contribution through new and different avenues to support a comprehensive, intelligent peace process and real nation building efforts.

• (1340)

The path to peace has to be organized around institutions that are designed for such tasks. The UN constellation of agencies, the very *raison d'être* of the UN, is surely in the best position to host those vital roles and initiatives. There are roles for UNICEF and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. Heaven knows we have a major problem to find the way to support and protect women in that society. There is a role for the United Nations Development Programme. Our development contribution has been outstripped 10:1 in terms of the resources allocated for Canada's current mission in Afghanistan. There is a role for United Nations Disarmament Commission, and there may be a role for the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which is led by a proud, distinguished Canadian woman who served this country as a distinguished CIDA official, as

a long-time UN official doing effective peace building in a number of countries.

At least two years ago, former deputy minister Gordon Smith stated before the foreign affairs committee, "What is needed is a process of substantial conversation or reorientation of anti-state elements into an open and non-violent political dynamic". This means placing our diplomatic weight behind peace initiatives at the local, regional and international levels in a coordinated fashion.

We need to be using the considerable skills and expertise of Canadians to help bring the various actors who are parties to these conflicts in Afghanistan to the table. Taking the path to peace through diplomacy also means involving the regional actors who are now excluded and often are contributing in devastating ways to the problems of violence in the region.

More than just new diplomacy, we also need better aid and development. Time does not allow me to talk in detail about this in the context of this debate, but we must do a better job in meaningful development work. There are some good, positive results where we are doing that in some parts of Afghanistan. We should acknowledge that and build on those strengths. What is needed is greater civilian oversight of the Canadian development aid, not more military engagement in a role that does not belong lodged within the military.

Given the decision the government has made to extend the current mission with the support of the Liberals, we are in danger of turning some of that good work that is being done in Afghanistan through the development effort, but not enough of it and not accompanied by a robust peace building effort, in the wrong direction.

It is very worrisome for those who have experience on the ground both in Afghanistan and in other conflict zones that the Manley report and the government apparently advocate directing more of our international development efforts into so-called signature projects.

What people need in Afghanistan is meaningful international development initiatives that will change in a positive way the lives of Afghans, not more Canadian flags to try to gain more Canadian support and approval for what we are doing in Afghanistan that is so deeply flawed.

We also know that a great deal more accountability is needed. Although this Liberal-Conservative motion to a large extent misses the very point of what is needed, it has to be acknowledged, and this is a positive thing, that there has not been the transparency and accountability and we need to build those in. In that respect there is some progress in this otherwise inadequate and flawed motion that is before us.

• (1345)

There were six women members of parliament here from Afghanistan. I was not surprised to hear both the foreign affairs minister and the CIDA minister say that they were just cheerleaders for exactly what the government is doing.

It is very tricky to have a debate here about the true sentiments of women who know what kind of punishment can be meted out to them for speaking out either inside or outside of parliament, especially outside of one's country.

Business of Supply

We know what happened with Malalai Joya, also a courageous woman member of parliament. She told the very same truth that was acknowledged by the six women members of parliament that women are at severe risk not just at the hands of the Taliban, but also at the hands of warlords and drug lords, and in some cases the northern alliance and even male members of parliament. For speaking out, Malalai Joya was not only evicted from parliament, but the protection she needed for her life to be safe was removed. This makes her at even greater risk.

I listened to those six members of parliament respectfully, and I welcomed the opportunity to do so. There were three points on which they expressed considerable interest and support. I thought one was quite interesting.

The leader of the NDP, the Afghan ambassador and I met with them. We raised the question of the UN getting on with the diplomatic effort and meaningful development. They looked us straight in the eye and told us that we needed to do that because they were too busy dealing with what needs to happen around working in compliance with the Afghanistan Compact and other important work.

They did not reject at all the notion that there needs to be a great deal more in terms of meaningful humanitarian aid and development effort. They indicated, and these were their words, that many of the people are being drawn into the Taliban because they are starving, because they are desperate, because they do not have jobs, because they do not have income and they cannot feed their families. Those people are easy prey for bribery or being paid so they can feed their families. How many times have we heard that from others? Who is in a better position to confirm that than those six members of parliament?

An increasing number of voices are speaking out about getting on the path to peace and getting off the war effort. They want us to begin to seriously undertake diplomatic and development work. I start by quoting the UN Special Representative for Afghanistan who several months ago stated:

—there is a cry for peace in Afghanistan, from the civil society...and there are possibilities for peace.

It is obvious that among those who support the Taliban and even among those who support their violent actions, there are...people who are tired of war and who respond to the cry of the people for peace. We from the United Nations will certainly support peace talks because the insurgency cannot be won over by military means and we have to keep the door open for negotiations.

Ernie Regehr, a much respected internationalist in terms of peace building and progress to peace, stated:

A comprehensive peace process is required to address the fundamental conflicts and grievances that remain unaddressed in Afghan society. This is a process to build a relationship of trust between the southern Pashtuns and the rest of the country, in the context of respect for fundamental rights and addressing the conflict that fuelled the civil war that predated the October 2001 U.S.-led invasion and is—

• (1350)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Halifax should wait until 7 o'clock tonight because what we are debating today is this: "That the House take note of the on-going national

discussion about Canada's role in Afghanistan". I realize they are related.

She talked about members of the military responding to the call of duty. Yes, they do. I can tell members that the hundreds of military members I have talked to also have a very clear assessment of the NDP's position on this. I could repeat it, but it would be using decidedly unparliamentary language so I will not.

The member talked about having NATO leave and having the UN come in. Who the heck does she think the 39 members of ISAF are? Who the heck does she think the 60 members who signed the Afghanistan Compact are, if not members of the United Nations?

She also displays a complete lack of understanding of what NATO does besides military operations.

She talks about military-only operations. Nobody has ever suggested that this is a military-only mission. What she is talking about by taking out NATO and taking out protection is that she in effect would be committing to massacre thousands of aid workers from the UN who would go in there without security. No responsible government is going to do that, and certainly not ours.

She talks about the 1:10 ratio of aid to war fighting. Again, she fails to understand or fails to acknowledge that a very large proportion of that number of 10 is made up of Canadian soldiers carrying out aid operations and reconstruction operations such as rebuilding and so on. The NDP members completely disregard that because it does not fit their socialist ideology.

However, I have a question for the member. She talked about the conflict in Afghanistan being between the Afghan people and regional players and said that if we take the side of the Afghan people we somehow are being biased. Does she honestly believe that the Afghan people, the democratic government of Afghanistan, is on an equal footing with a terrorist organization such as the Taliban, which has brutalized that country and brutalized those people for so many years? If that is what she honestly believes, then the assessment of the military members I have talked to is, regrettably, accurate.

• (1355)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, after all of the member's assertions, I have to say that I have some difficulty with the question itself. However, let me say this. I think we have a responsibility to acknowledge that the Afghan government, as all indications would suggest, has actually had a serious erosion of confidence in its ability to do the job. That is assessed to be in the range of 30%.

Therefore, we have to understand that there are problems which have created and contributed to that. They have to do with the flawed mission, the mission which fails to recognize that the people of Afghanistan need to see not more Canadian flags; they need to see that the Government of Afghanistan exists for the purpose of delivering to the people of Afghanistan a better life.

When Canada says our role is going to be overwhelmingly tied to a counter-insurgency mission in Kandahar and that we will outspend military dollars to development dollars by 10:1, we are missing the point of what would actually make a difference in paving the path to peace.

Statements by Members

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Quit misleading the House. Just be honest for a change.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I do not need any lectures from this member about how military people observe the NDP. He can hurl all the insults he will, as he is doing, but the fact of the matter is that I proudly represent what I think is probably the largest military centre in the country on a per capita basis.

Yes, some of them support the position of the New Democratic Party, and some of them do not, but I think, to try to characterize the NDP's commitment consistently to get us onto a path to peace, that it is not something rejected by the military but actually is what military people would want to see from their government and their elected officials.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we agree wholeheartedly with our colleague from Halifax that Canadian soldiers are giving dedicated service, especially since they are serving as a result of a decision by the House of Commons. We agree completely with that.

My question has two parts. First, does she not recognize that her party's position is irresponsible when she says that soldiers should have been withdrawn immediately, when the House had to make that decision? Moving soldiers is not like moving people in a campground. Second, does she not recognize that when she voted with the Conservatives last year to end the mission in February 2009, she actually contributed to extending the mission until 2011?

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I heard this fiction reported again today by the Bloc defence critic. Usually, I have to say, I respect him in terms of his points of view, but I do not know who could actually believe that advocating we should move immediately toward giving notice for the safe and secure withdrawal of our troops after 2007 would be somehow an act of irresponsibility. The Bloc has come to understand why this is the course that needs to be pursued. The Bloc, in trying to suggest that the one party that has been absolutely consistent on this point—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member for Halifax. When we return to the study of the motion, there will be four minutes left for the hon. member for Halifax under questions and comments. We will now hear statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

LAKE SIMCOE

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize our government's efforts to help clean up Lake Simcoe.

Last month, the Minister of the Environment announced \$18 million to help preserve Ontario's precious Lake Simcoe. This funding is in addition to the \$12 million that was announced last year

and brings the Conservative government's total investment in Lake Simcoe to \$30 million.

Lake Simcoe is a drinking water source for eight municipalities, including my riding of Barrie. It is known for its recreation industry, which generates more than \$200 million in annual revenue.

These funds will have a positive impact on reducing the high phosphorus levels that impact marine life and cause excessive weed growth in Kempenfelt Bay.

In addition to the \$30 million, the government has also banned the dumping of sewage and other waste from watercraft, implemented ballast water control and management regulations protecting Lake Simcoe from invasive species, and moved to virtually ban phosphates in detergents, which harm the lake.

Kempenfelt Bay and Lake Simcoe are environmental jewels within Simcoe County. I am proud that these funds will help protect them for future generations.

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TIMISKAMING DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Timiskaming District Secondary School in New Liskeard on being selected by the British Council in Canada to take part in a significant international Arctic expedition next September. This journey will focus on the impact of climate change in the Canadian Arctic.

This unique opportunity will enable students from Timiskaming District Secondary School to carry out a wide range of scientific experiments and research while traveling on a ship through the Canadian Arctic. Their findings will then be shared with other schools within the local community and the province as a whole.

Furthermore, this international Arctic expedition will provide significant contributions, such as educational films and photography, to curriculum planning across Canada.

Once again, I wish to congratulate the staff and students at Timiskaming District Secondary School of New Liskeard for their initiative, their creativity, their community spirit and, most importantly, their recognition of the significance of the Canadian Arctic to all of us.

* * *

[*Translation*]

OUTDOORS CAUCUS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, millions of hunting and fishing enthusiasts of all ages pump more than \$10 billion into the economy every year.

Established in March 2006, the outdoor caucus is one of the largest non-partisan caucuses on Parliament Hill. Its mission is to bring together MPs and senators who wish to promote activities such as hunting, fishing, birdwatching, walking, cycling, sport shooting and trapping in order to preserve these activities, promote safety and protect wildlife and natural habitats.

Statements by Members

I therefore urge all members who wish to promote these interests to join the outdoors caucus so that all citizens may contribute to the preservation of natural spaces of unparalleled beauty and practice traditional, environmentally sustainable activities, all the while respecting provincial jurisdictions.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tonight the House will have the opportunity to vote on a straightforward confidence motion sponsored by New Democrats. It expresses our deep frustration that, despite the urgent need to effectively address the climate change crisis, the Conservative government refuses to bring the clean air and climate change act to a vote.

The Conservatives' original clean air act did not have the support of the House, environmentalists or Canadians. That was when New Democrats succeeded in convincing all parties that the bill should be completely rewritten in a process whereby all parties could have input and influence.

It was rewritten. Now the new clean air and climate change act contains ideas championed by all parties and is supported by the environmental community.

Still the government refuses to bring it to a vote. Given the climate change crisis, this Parliament must act. By passing the clean air and climate change act, this Parliament can take action that will make a difference.

Canadians want action from this Parliament on climate change. The Conservatives have not taken their responsibility for climate change seriously. They do not have the confidence of Canadians when it comes to dealing with this crisis. They should not command the confidence of this House.

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MEDAL OF BRAVERY

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 29, I had the great honour of attending a commemoration at Rideau Hall that recognized a number of outstanding Canadians, including a constituent of mine from the village of Lafontaine, Ontario: Randy Smith, the Fire Chief of the Township of Tiny.

Fire Chief Smith and 10 others were awarded the Medal of Bravery for the courage and determination they displayed on August 27, 2004. On that date, a massive mudslide near Terrace, B.C., trapped two men in a river of mud and debris. Even with the threat of further mudslides and against heavy rain and thick mud, Randy and his colleagues risked their lives to rescue the two men.

Randy's wife, Donna, and their three children, Christine, Jason and Mark, are tremendously proud of Randy. I join with them in commending Randy and the 40 other true Canadian heroes who received Medals of Bravery last month and I invite all members of the House to also do so.

While I have the attention of the House, I might also congratulate the member for Cambridge, who happens to be celebrating his 50th birthday today.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

MOHAMED KOHAIL

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has to be vigilant in cases where Canadian citizens are being detained abroad, especially in countries that still have the death penalty.

This is not a matter of interfering in another country's business, but of ensuring that all the rights of each Canadian citizen are respected and, more importantly, that each gets a fair trial.

In the case of Mohamed Kohail, who is being held in Saudi Arabia and is sentenced to death, his lawyer was present just once in the nine phases of the trial and the witnesses in his client's defence were disallowed.

In light of the very short deadline before Mohamed Kohail's execution, it is imperative that the Government of Canada act swiftly to have his rights and defence respected and heard.

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[English]

CANADIAN COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the men and women of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, maritime region. The auxiliary's 16 directors, under the able chairmanship of Frank McLaughlin, just completed its annual meeting in Halifax. This volunteer organization, which is staffed primarily by fishing captains and their crews, successfully participate in over 200 search and rescue missions annually.

Under the direction of the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Halifax, the Coast Guard Auxiliary Maritimes was tasked to go to sea in over 5,200 missions since it was formed in 1978. These 732 skilled mariners are constantly upgrading their search and rescue skills and risk their lives to ensure that those in peril on the sea are brought back to land safely.

I wish to pay tribute to and give thanks for the brave service and high level of technical capability these courageous volunteers provide for all Canadians and indeed all international mariners who travel the waters off our east coast.

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[Translation]

MAISON AU DIAPASON

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to acknowledge in this House the excellent work of a group of citizens from my riding who are dedicated to the well-being of those nearing the end of life.

Statements by Members

These are citizens from Brome—Missisquoi and Haute-Yamaska who initiated the project for a regional palliative care centre: the Maison au Diapason. In addition to palliative care for the terminally ill, the centre will provide specialized technical and psychological support to the afflicted families.

The centre, which will be located in Bromont, is an eight-room house with living rooms and space for the families. The public is contributing to this project through numerous fundraising activities. A few months ago, a group successfully climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and, these days, volunteers are selling bricks, symbolizing the construction of the house, for just a few dollars.

I wish the best of luck to the support team at the Maison au Diapason.

* * *

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the government set aside \$83 million for public transit infrastructure in Mississauga. I am delighted that the contribution agreements were recently signed. This money is now flowing to the municipality for this long overdue project.

Mississauga has been waiting for 12 long years for this funding. That is because for 10 years the previous Liberal successive governments ignored the needs of Mississauga.

I thank the Prime Minister, as well as the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for helping the people of Mississauga.

This government continues to address the infrastructure deficit left by the successive Liberal governments. We are investing in the future with our building Canada plan, which will deliver \$33 billion to municipalities over seven years. In budget 2008 we are making the gas tax fund permanent so municipalities can better plan and finance their infrastructure.

As we can see, the Conservative government is investing in the infrastructure that Canada needs.

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TIBET

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 49th anniversary of the uprising of the Tibetan people, that fateful day in 1959 when Tibetans took to the streets of Tibet's capital, Lhasa, to protest China's invasion and illegal occupation of Tibet.

Like thousands of people around the world, we in the Canadian Parliament remember those who have stood up for what they believe in. Like those courageous people 49 years ago and those who still struggle valiantly inside Tibet, we are standing up for what we believe in and demanding a peaceful resolution of the Tibetan issue.

As a member of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet, I had the privilege of meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama during his recent visit to Canada, and talking about Yukon and Burma. In his presence, one is overwhelmed by the grace and peace that has

sustained for a lifetime his epic struggle for his people in Tibet and the autonomy that is rightfully theirs and will return to them one day.

* * *

• (1410)

[Translation]

NATIONAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRUST

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, in the presence of a minister representing the Quebec government, our Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities announced that the Government of Canada will be allocating \$216.9 million over three years to the Government of Quebec as part of the new national community development trust to help vulnerable communities and workers.

The trust builds on other initiatives brought in by our government to shelter the country's economy from instability in international markets and to make Canada stronger and more prosperous in the long term.

Once again, the Conservative members have fought for Quebec workers while the Bloc, always empty-handed, has done nothing more than concoct ideas about Quebec separation.

The Bloc Québécois can provide no real results, nor can it provide any money. All it can do is talk and talk, condemned to eternity on the opposition benches.

* * *

[English]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative-Liberal budget has done nothing for the working families of northern Ontario. At a time when oil is peaking at above \$100 a barrel, there is no plan to stop the gouging at the pumps, which is affecting consumers across the north.

Even worse is the fact that there no plan in place to help rural people who are stuck with increasingly high fuel bills. I know senior citizens who are paying over \$900 a month just to stay warm. The problem is if people have an oil boiler in northern Ontario, it is difficult to convert to other alternative technologies.

That is why we need a plan to move to a greener technology for rural people. I would suggest wood pellets because the pellets can be created out of any kind of wood waste. It is a much greener technology.

The fact is the government has to stop protecting its buddies in the oil patch and start recognizing that rural people in northern Ontario deserve a government with a vision for a sustainable future.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

JUTRA AWARDS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night, Quebec's best film actors, directors, producers and creators were honoured at the Jutra awards ceremony.

Hosted by the lively Normand Brathwaite, the 10th Jutra awards celebrated outstanding performances, with awards won by Roy Dupuis for *Shake Hands with the Devil*, and Guylaine Tremblay for *Contre toute espérance*, subtitled *Summit Circle* in English, and also highlighted outstanding direction, with an award won by Stéphane Lafleur for *Continental, a film without guns*.

The evening also showed us that our film industry is alive and well, and that it is able to reach a large audience and touch many people across the province and throughout the world.

I ask all of my colleagues to join me in congratulating all the Jutra award winners and participants.

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JUTRA AWARDS

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last night, the 10th annual Jutra awards gala was held. The gala first toured several cinemas in Quebec from February 25 to 28, presenting the four films in the best film category. To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the awards, a retrospective of Quebec's best films from the past ten years was presented. This year's best film was *Continental, a film without guns*.

The Jutra for best actor went to Roy Dupuis for his portrayal of General Dallaire in the movie *Shake Hands with the Devil*. Guylaine Tremblay won the Jutra in the best actress category for her role in the film *Contre toute espérance (Summit Circle)*. The Jutra-Hommage tribute award went to an important director who is considered a key witness of our times and our history, Jean-Claude Labrecque. The quality of the films and documentaries made by this man, who views cinema as a means of presenting history, is remarkable.

Congratulations to all the winners and everyone who was nominated.

* * *

•(1415)

[English]

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to report that after three years of hard work, informing, petitioning, cajoling, my Motion No. 19 and its previous incarnation, Motion No. 238, calling on the government to lift visitor visa requirements for the new EU member states of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia, was finally implemented in its entirety.

Nineteen years ago the Iron Curtain came down and, finally, a week ago Canada's visa curtain came down as well. It is immensely gratifying that this Easter will be the first that families and friends from Poland, Hungary, the Baltic states, Slovakia and the Czech

Republic will be able to visit their loved ones in Canada, and all it will take is the purchase of a plane ticket.

It is rare for the contents of an opposition private member's motion to be adopted in its entirety by the government. I am humbled by the support I received in the thousands of communications and petitions from individuals in diaspora organizations throughout Canada.

Together we were many and we made it happen.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals continue to demonstrate their distrust in the ability of parents to take care of their own children.

The member for Beaches—East York has said that parents are only capable of providing child minding, not child care.

Just last week the Liberal MP for Scarborough—Guildwood called the universal child care benefit “a cheesy program”. What an insult to the over 1.4 million families that benefit from this program.

Our plan helps parents pay for the type of care that is best for their families, and it has lifted approximately 55,000 children out of low income status.

The previous Liberal government promised a so-called national child care program in every election since 1993. Sheila Copps said it right when she said, “The Liberal plan is a cash cow for government while families are cash poor”.

As our Prime Minister has said:

Children aren't raised in academic faculties or government offices or the boardrooms of social activists. Children are raised in families, so that's where the money flows.

* * *

[Translation]

ACCESS TO CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the transmission of solid and credible information is vital to the life of a community. For this reason, all taxpayers annually fund the CBC/Radio-Canada, a public network that broadcasts information and promotes culture.

Given that all Canadians contribute to its funding, the network should reflect the reality of citizens living in the communities it serves. Since 1990, the *Téléjournal de l'Est du Québec* has been produced in Quebec City. What would Torontonians say if their news broadcasts were produced in Montreal?

Even worse. CBC/Radio-Canada does not intend to replace its analog signal east of Rimouski. That means that for CBC/Radio-Canada there are two classes of citizens: they pay the same price but do not receive the same service.

People in eastern Quebec deserve to be included in the CBC/Radio-Canada network and do not accept the withdrawal of service.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***ETHICS**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like something clarified for Canadians. Is it true that the first time the Prime Minister learned of a financial offer to Mr. Cadman was during his meeting with Mrs. Cadman on September 9, 2005?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal approach and story on this seems to be shifting quite dramatically as well, as is usually the case with the Liberals.

The only meeting that happened, as I have said time and again, was on May 19. We have been very clear about that and consistent on that fact.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member understood the question. I will repeat it.

When did the Prime Minister first hear about the financial offer made to Mr. Cadman? Was it on September 9 during his meeting with Mrs. Cadman, yes or no? The question is clear. Will the member answer it?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem with the question is that there was no financial offer. There was no offer.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, so why, on the tape, does the Prime Minister speak about a financial offer? Why, on the tape, does he speak about financial insecurity, financial issues and financial considerations?

If the Prime Minister was speaking the truth on the tape, why is the member opposite trying to mislead this House?

The Prime Minister said on tape that there was a financial offer made to Mr. Cadman, but he tried to say to his operatives “do not press Mr. Cadman”. This is the truth.

• (1420)

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker, it is not the truth no matter how many times the Leader of the Opposition might have to tell himself to try to convince himself of that.

The Liberals have already made up their minds on this issue. They have decided that the Prime Minister was aware and complicit in a crime. They are false on that issue and they are going to have to—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. James Moore: They cheer now, but they will not be cheering in the very near future.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister himself is on tape confirming that an offer to Mr. Cadman dealt with financial considerations. Canadians have still not been told what were those considerations.

Mr. Cadman and his family had legitimate financial concerns about what would happen after his death. It just seems obvious that the Conservatives made an offer to address those concerns.

So again, and we will keep on until we get an answer, what specific financial offer was made to address the concerns of Mr. Cadman and his family?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the specific offer given to Chuck Cadman, the specific offer of May 19 had three components: first, to rejoin the Conservative caucus; second, we would help him secure the Conservative Party nomination; and third, we would support him in his re-election in whatever financial help he might need getting re-elected as a Conservative candidate. Those are the three elements he received.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he did not need a Conservative nomination. He was not going to run. He did not need their help.

How long will they keep repeating these stories? No one believes them.

So I ask the member again, what financial considerations were offered to Mr. Cadman and his family?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, Chuck Cadman was going to run again.

Second, the only other offer that was put on the table was the offer, as I said, to rejoin the Conservatives, get re-nominated as a Conservative, and that we would offer him any financial support that was necessary and mandated by Elections Canada, allowed by Elections Canada, to seek re-election.

The Liberals are saying some awfully outrageous things here in the House of Commons, but the longer they continue to avoid the facts, the longer they are going to continue to delude themselves of anything other than the simple facts of what Chuck Cadman himself said is the truth here. Chuck Cadman himself said this was the only offer. I think the Liberals should accept his word.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, I asked the Prime Minister whether he knew in September 2005 that his party had approached Chuck Cadman about rejoining the Conservative caucus.

Today, four days later, I ask the same question: did the Prime Minister know in September 2005 that his party had approached Chuck Cadman about rejoining the caucus? Yes or no?

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Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows the offer that was made to Chuck Cadman on May 19, 2005. The three people who were at the meeting have all said the same thing. At the meeting, Mr. Cadman received an offer to rejoin our caucus, run as a Conservative candidate and be re-elected as a Conservative candidate. Mr. Cadman was offered any help he needed to be re-elected as a Conservative.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is not what I am asking. The member is telling me that the people who met with Chuck Cadman offered to have him rejoin the caucus. My question is this: did the Prime Minister know that his assistants, his advisors, had proposed that Mr. Cadman rejoin the Conservative Party? Did the Prime Minister know that in September 2005?

I do not want to know what Tom Flanagan proposed; I want to know whether the Prime Minister knew what Mr. Flanagan was doing. Did he or did he not know that Mr. Cadman had received an offer to rejoin the caucus? The question is clear.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, the Prime Minister, like everyone in our caucus, knew that Chuck Cadman had received an offer to rejoin our caucus, run for election and be re-elected as a Conservative.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, finally, the parliamentary secretary has told us that the Prime Minister knew in September 2005 that Chuck Cadman had been invited to rejoin the caucus. So why, when he met with the journalist, did he not tell him that a proposal had been made to Cadman for him to rejoin the caucus? He talks about details; that is not a detail. Rather, he is talking about financial considerations.

Why did he not say, at that point, if he knew, that the offer was to rejoin the caucus? Let him explain it now, so we can see.

•(1425)

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister explained exactly those facts. He has so several times in this House now, as have I. In addition, each of the three people present at that meeting, Chuck Cadman, Tom Flanagan and Doug Finley, has said the same thing.

I understand that the Bloc does not want to understand those facts, but those facts are the reality and that is the situation. Each one of those three people says the same thing; that is the reality, those are the facts.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what he has just said is false. He has never told this House that the Prime Minister knew it in September 2005. The Prime Minister has always refused to answer those questions. The Prime Minister did not know, for one very simple reason: that is not what Chuck Cadman was offered. That is why the Prime Minister refuses to answer questions. He talked about details, about financial considerations.

Let him explain it to us, for once. So he has told us that he knew about it. How is it that he did not tell the journalist that it had been proposed that he rejoin the caucus? He talked about details. I submit to him that rejoining the caucus is not a detail. Let him explain that, rather than answering—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services has the floor.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a vivid imagination. What is needed here is for us to use and consider all the facts we have on the table. The facts are clear, they are simple. I have presented the facts here to this House. Chuck Cadman himself said that in two national television broadcasts and also in a radio broadcast in Vancouver. He said the same thing every time.

The member wants to ignore the facts and ask questions that are in no way based on the facts. We stand with Chuck Cadman, who said himself that there had been only one offer, the offer to rejoin the Conservative Party.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, NAFTA poses serious problems; workers' families know it and are suffering the consequences. The Minister of International Trade told the representative of Maine in the U.S. Congress that Canada was open to amending NAFTA. Michael Michaud, like the NDP, knows that the current agreement is not a good thing for today's families.

Will the Prime Minister inform the Americans that Canada will renegotiate NAFTA or does he prefer to allow his office to meddle in the U.S. elections?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will give the NDP members credit for consistency. At least they have always been against NAFTA, not just some of the time. Their consistency, however, flies in the face of facts that show that NAFTA has been a tremendous success and that is why we support it.

Nearly 4.1 million net new jobs have been created in Canada since 1993, representing an increase of 32% over pre-NAFTA employment levels. It is a record that has continued under this government: 43,000 net new jobs in February; 361,000 net new jobs in the past 12 months; and 799,000 net new jobs since we became a government. Almost one million more Canadians are working today.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is refusing to answer the question. The fact is that our Minister of Industry told a U.S. congressman that Canada was willing to reopen NAFTA, but then we have public statements that suggest the contrary.

Oral Questions

I simply want to ask the following question. Is the Prime Minister and is the government willing to improve the environmental and labour standards of NAFTA, or when it comes to standing up for something, are they only willing to stand up for their friends, the Republicans, when it comes to NAFTA?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been consistent throughout. We believe that NAFTA is a good agreement that is serving the interests of Canada and Canadians very well. We think it is serving the interests of the other partners very well.

There has been no effort and no offer on our part to reopen NAFTA. We think it works well. That being said, if there is an effort to reopen it, we will of course continue to pursue a stronger NAFTA that continues to advance Canadians' interests.

It has served us very well. We have seen that since it was first entered into. We have seen that it continues to serve us well under a government that now has good policies that deliver nearly a million new Canadian jobs since we became the government.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works told Lawrence Martin, a senior Ottawa journalist, that the Conservatives were working out a financial package for Chuck Cadman, yet last Friday he told the House that Mr. Martin was wrong.

Over the weekend, Lawrence Martin again confirmed that the parliamentary secretary laid out the scheme in 2005. Just who should we believe, a senior journalist or a parliamentary secretary with the unenviable task of defending the indefensible?

• (1430)

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I said in the House last week was that what was reported was that at the time I knew the details of the meeting on May 19. That is what was reported and that element was in fact entirely not true.

I had no information about what was specifically offered at the May 19 meeting. We now do know what was offered at the May 19 meeting. They were the three elements that I have already mentioned in the House a number of times.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again they are changing their story.

Lawrence Martin, to whom the parliamentary secretary spoke, said: "I fear that the parliamentary secretary's memory is short." He wrote it in the newspaper without the immunity of the House.

Will the parliamentary secretary do the same? Will he tell the House what exactly he was discussing in 2005 or will he take Mr. Martin to court?

[*English*]

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, she is asking the exact same question in French that I already answered in English. I will just reiterate again that the column last week said that I knew the specifics of the meeting of May 19. That element of the column is of course not true.

I did not know what was going on, on May 19, 2005, but we do now know. Chuck Cadman himself said what happened at the meeting and his words are very clear.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us recap. We know Mr. Cadman told his wife, his daughter and his son-in-law that he had been offered a life insurance policy, and that he considered it a bribe.

We know that the Prime Minister was aware of discussions about the policy involving Mr. Cadman and legitimate representatives of the Conservative Party.

We know that the Prime Minister, who seems willing to talk about matters that relate to Mr. Cadman and his family, will not answer questions that relate to his own words: what they mean and what he knew.

I will give the Prime Minister another chance. They are his words: "I don't know the details. I know that there were discussions".

Tell us what those words mean.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, part of the problem with the Liberals' line of attack on this issue is that they had an advance copy of the book a year ago. If they really believed in these allegations, if they really believed in what they were saying, why have they been sitting on this for a year?

They have been sitting on this for a year because they are using it now as an attempt to distract from their own leadership issues and to distract from the problems they are having within their own caucus.

The truth and the facts of this matter are clear. They are right before us in the words of Chuck Cadman himself, about the only offer that was made to Chuck Cadman. The Liberals know it and they are trying to distract, spin and all this nonsense. They know it is not true. We know the truth. Chuck Cadman spoke the truth.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as time passes, it is clear that the answers the Prime Minister and parliamentary secretary are giving are to questions that have not been asked and no matter how hard they spin, all anyone can hear are the answers they have not given.

They are about the Prime Minister. They are about the Zytaruk tapes. They are about his own words: "I don't know the details. I know that there were discussions".

Tell us what those words mean.

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Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there were discussions on May 19, as I have described in this House of Commons. I have said many times that those discussions took place and that they were regarding Chuck Cadman's reintegration into the Conservative Party and to run as a Conservative candidate. I have said that again and again and I will continue to do so.

I thank the member for York Centre for allowing me, for the 38th time, to say the exact same thing.

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[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the development of francophone minority communities is not a priority for the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages. Not only was there no money in the budget for these communities, but the action plan for official languages expires on March 31. While this increases the urgency of the situation, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages is holding up the release of the Lord report.

Will the minister finally take action on official languages and tell us what she intends to do when the action plan for official languages expires on March 31, 2008?

• (1435)

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, our government has promised to develop the second phase of the action plan for official languages. I am surprised by the Bloc Québécois' sudden interest in linguistic minority communities across the country.

As our government promised the communities, we have held consultations. I received Bernard Lord's report on March 3. We are studying the recommendations for the next phase of the plan.

That said, I would like to know what the Bloc Québécois is proposing for the anglophone minority community in Quebec.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the most recent figures on the language of work in Quebec are worrisome. In the Montreal area, more than 25% of workers work in English. This situation could be different if the Canada Labour Code had been amended to allow the application of Bill 101 on language of work to federal institutions in Quebec. This measure would affect roughly 240,000 Quebec workers.

Will the government give real meaning to recognizing Quebec as a nation and support the Bloc Québécois' Bill C-482?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said to the hon. member, our government is committed to both our official languages in the country, and we will continue to focus on these responsibilities.

FILM INDUSTRY

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the Jutra awards, the feelings expressed about Bill C-10 were unanimous, and two of the winning producers, Luc Déry and Kim McCraw, summed it up when they said that the bill was an abomination that threatens freedom of expression.

Does the minister plan on listening to the demands of the Quebec film community, which is calling on the government to remove the reference to "public policy", which definitely could lead to censorship?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, the bill was passed in this House on October 29, 2007, with the support of all the parties. All of a sudden, the Bloc has questions. That said, we are talking to the industry to take their concerns and comments into consideration.

I would invite the Bloc member, since he did not understand when he voted on October 29, to read an article published in *La Presse* late last week, which provides an excellent explanation of the government's intentions.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the president of the Quebec office of the Campaign Life Coalition, Luc Gagnon, said that Bill C-484 is a first step towards recriminalizing abortion.

Right-wing religious groups also applaud this initiative. The situation is worrisome, because the same strategy was used by the opponents of freedom of choice in the United States to have abortion criminalized.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages take action to defend the rights of women against such a possibility? That is her duty. Will she fulfill it?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I had the opportunity to indicate last week, this is a private member's bill and I exercised my right to vote, which was entirely free.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the story goes well beyond the Prime Minister's chief of staff. It involves a senior source at the Canadian embassy in Washington. This source was contacted by American and Canadian media and apparently confirmed that it was Senator Obama's campaign that contacted Canadian officials regarding NAFTA.

Will the Prime Minister's investigation include the Canadian embassy in Washington and, specifically, any role that Ambassador Michael Wilson may have played in this scandal?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government was clear last week: the investigation is comprehensive and we will get to the bottom of this issue with full transparency.

I thank my hon. colleague for this question, which allows me to confirm this government's position on transparency. We are accountable to Canadians and we will remain accountable on this issue.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this was not just a mistake. This was senior public servants giving secret information to journalists. This is very serious.

Will the investigation into this affair determine whether the ambassador, Michael Wilson, was the primary source at the Canadian embassy who passed this information along?

• (1440)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are currently conducting an independent investigation into this affair. I cannot make assumptions about the results of the investigation, which will be released in due time. The House will be informed of the outcome of the investigation.

[*English*]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of trust. The world now knows that the Prime Minister's office cannot be trusted with confidential information. His chief of staff, Ian Brodie, started the NAFTA-gate scandal by casually discussing sensitive diplomatic conversations to entertain reporters.

If the Prime Minister gave the order, then he is complicit. If Ian Brodie acted on his own, then he is incompetent. Either way, the Prime Minister has a responsibility to tell the House whether his chief of staff is under investigation. Yes or no?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the relationship between our country and the U.S. is a very important one and we are proud to have a free trade agreement. We have had the agreement for a long time and it has been very productive for Canada, for Mexico and for the U.S. It is a good agreement. We create jobs under this agreement. It is still in force and I hope it will stay in force.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems that NAFTA-gate swings both ways. Never mind Obama and Clinton. We now have confirmed reports that behind closed doors the Minister of International Trade told congressman, Michael Michaud, that Canada would be willing to renegotiate NAFTA, this despite the Prime Minister's assurances that the government has no interest in reopening the agreement.

The question is very simple. Who do we trust: the Prime Minister, the minister or none of the above?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is so far from the truth. We have an agreement with the U.S. and with Mexico and the agreement is working. The agreement has been useful for Canadians, for families and for entrepreneurs in Canada. The agreement creates a lot of jobs in this country, a lot of

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jobs in Mexico and the U.S. I hope that this agreement will stay in force and it must stay in force.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, global warming is one of the most serious challenges that we face. Our government announced last April the framework of our plan to cut Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. Since then, government officials and ministers have been consulting with environmental groups, provinces and industry to design the details of our plan.

Could the Minister of the Environment tell the House when the government will be releasing the details of our government's plan to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions an absolute 20% by 2020?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to tell the House that today we are releasing the meat to the bones of our regulatory plan. The details of our regulation will be posted on Environment Canada's website this afternoon.

We made a commitment to Canadians to cut greenhouse gases by an absolute 20%. We are following through on that commitment and we will be delivering real results.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' record on greenhouse gas production, including development of the oil sands, is catastrophic. This is what the Prime Minister said, "Kyoto is basically a socialist plot to suck money out of wealthy countries".

The Conservatives are always talking about respecting law and order. Do they realize that failing to comply with our international obligations may have disastrous consequences for future generations and for Canada's reputation today?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do think it is a stain on the Government of Canada that the previous government was unable to not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but to sit back and watch them rise by some 33% above the commitments that it signed.

That is why the member will be excited to learn that we are moving aggressively to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in 17 sectors of the Canadian economy and mandating carbon capture and storage for new oil sands projects, something the previous government lacked the resolve to do.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we heard the government today claim that it cares about pollution from the tar sands but let us look at the truth of the matter because what the government is saying does not amount to anything more than hot air.

Last week the Federal Court said that the environmental assessments being done of the tar sands were full of holes.

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The Canadian ambassador to the United States wrote to the Americans and asked that the tar sands be exempted from American environmental controls.

Why is the government trying to weasel out from environmental controls both here in Canada and in the United States when it comes to the tar sands?

• (1445)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We are taking real action, the toughest action ever taken in Canadian history. We have among the toughest industry regulations in the world.

I am starting to get the feeling that we are losing the confidence of the NDP. However, the good news is that it is nice to be able to count on the support of the Liberal Party of Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF CANADA FOR THE REGIONS OF QUEBEC

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Conservatives came to power, some regions have been favoured by the Minister for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, while others have been ignored. One of the regions that have not found favour is the region of Montreal. This is completely bizarre. I would even say that it is absolutely ridiculous. We are talking about the engine of the manufacturing sector in Quebec.

Is there something personal in this? Is it because the Minister does not like Montreal, or simply because Montreal does not elect any Conservative members?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not need lectures from a man who was once on the payroll of a communications agency cited by Mr. Justice Gomery at the same time as he was working for the Liberal Party of Canada.

The Economic Development Agency of Canada works for all regions of Quebec, including Montreal.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, I think the member has a lot to learn. This is not the first time that favouritism in the distribution of campaign goodies by the Minister has been pointed out. We all know now that the Minister likes to hand out goodies to his chums.

I am going to quote someone: "Our campaign platform for Quebec also provides for depoliticizing the [Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec]". We know who said that. It was the person sitting beside the Minister, the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Why has she changed her mind? Is it because she too has received a lot of goodies from her friend?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of all the

political parties in this House put together, the Liberals are not the ones to be lecturing us about favouritism. Do the words "sponsorship scandal" not remind them of something?

* * *

[English]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister continues to attack Ontarians with falsehoods.

For manufacturers, only four provinces have lower corporate tax rates and Ontario's combined tax rate is lower than all 50 U.S. states. The minister's false claims are a desperate attempt to hide his own incompetence.

The minister was the architect of a \$5.6 billion deficit in Ontario, Walkerton, Ipperwash and the jailing of the homeless.

When will the minister realize that his approach is a road to disaster?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the member opposite does not believe a word she just said.

If we listen to the critic, the member for Markham—Unionville, when the Harris government was in office, in which I was privileged to be finance minister for part of that time, he said, "I think taxing is a bold and innovative move and I think it will pay dividends, a huge bang for the buck through low corporate taxes".

The Leader of the Opposition said the same thing about federal corporate taxes, "Get them down". We are doing that. Why not the same thing in the provinces, especially Ontario?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister continues with his falsehoods. He attacked Ontario for four weeks, arguing that he will not support the ailing manufacturing and auto sectors.

Now the Prime Minister gets into the fray with incorrect information. He was wrong about P.E.I. He praised Manitoba for cutting capital taxes but said nothing about Ontario having done the same thing.

Why does he continue to run down Ontario?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I love Ontario and I like low taxes. I would like to see low taxes in the province of Ontario.

What do we see in the country? We see a Liberal government in the province of British Columbia lowering its business taxes. We see an NDP government in the province of Manitoba lowering its taxes.

What is wrong with the Liberal government in the province of Ontario, which has the highest taxes on new business investment in the whole country? This is not good for business. It is anti-jobs. It will kill jobs in the province of Ontario. It hurts investment.

Oral Questions

● (1450)

[Translation]

KOSOVO

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it has been three weeks since the Kosovars declared independence. The United States and the major European powers have recognized that new state. Canada, however, has remained silent. Every time we question him, the Minister of Foreign Affairs says he is looking into the matter. The independence of Kosovo is not a new matter; this is something that has been in the air for 10 years.

How can the Minister of Foreign Affairs explain not having an answer by now? Does he not realize that speedy recognition is essential to ensuring stability in that region?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for this question.

Last week, in Brussels, I had discussions with my counterparts, the NATO foreign ministers. Kosovo was on the agenda. We have had good discussions. We are watching how the situation evolves in the area. In due course, once our assessment is complete, the Government of Canada will state its position.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during a visit to Canada, former Russian Prime Minister Sergey Vladimirovich Stepashin told parliamentarians he was pleased with Canada's position.

Knowing that Russia is opposed to Kosovo being recognized in any way, are we to understand that Canada is refusing to recognize this new state?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a sovereign state. We make our own decisions and, in due course, we will inform Canadians.

* * *

[English]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Charles McVety brags of successfully lobbying Conservative ministers. Many report his lobbying efforts include discussions with the public safety minister and the justice minister and numerous meetings with officials in the Prime Minister's Office.

Charles McVety is not registered as a lobbyist. Nor does his name appear with any registered lobbyist. Why is the government ignoring federal lobbying rules?

Why does the Conservative government have one set of rules for its friends and another for everyone else?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we in this government are very proud to have brought forward one of the toughest anti-corruption laws in the history of Canada. We expect all people to obey those laws.

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of the Environment announced barely moments ago, the government just published the details of its plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and impose stricter rules on major industries.

Could the Minister of the Environment speak about some of the main measures contained in our government's plan to fight climate change?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the best question ever from this side of the House.

Today, we announced the specifics of our plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% in absolute terms. We have provided all the details about a carbon exchange, an offset system and concrete measures. We will continue to work hard to fight climate change and we will achieve real results for Canada.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the children of Attawapiskat are not the only children being targeted by the minister. He cancelled the school at Rocky Bay First Nation even though his predecessor identified a serious need to take action.

The minister tells Canadians that these children do not need or deserve a school because there are no immediate health concerns. What a meagre, miserable standard for education.

Is the minister telling us that as long as children are not directly injured or killed in a building that his government has no further obligation to them?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his calm and rational explanation of the situation. The situation is this. There was a diesel spill in that school 29 years ago. About seven or eight years ago it was determined it was not safe for children to be in those facilities so new facilities were provided. Over the last seven or eight years \$5 million has been provided for those students, including additions to the local high school so kids can attend there for part of their schooling as well.

We continue to work with the chief and council. They are eager to work with us, unlike the member who just spoke.

● (1455)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am kind of surprised the minister is still making things up.

Oral Questions

Let us go back to Rocky Bay. I will read a report that is sitting on his desk. It says that the situation in Rocky Bay “poses a serious health and safety hazard to children”, “asbestos” indoors, “mould”, “over stressed beams”, “the roof risks collapse from strong winds or a heavy snowfall”. A roof that risks collapse from a heavy snowfall, this is appalling.

How can he sit in the House knowing those children are being put directly at risk because of his cavalier attitude?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for sure, one class that is necessary is anger management. I guess the member kind of makes my point, which I have explained to him on several occasions. The first concern is for health and safety. When we hear about examples like he listed, those things take priority. It may be necessary to change a seven or eight year old classroom, and I look forward to the day when we can do that.

However, the first priority has to be the health and safety of children. We do not base our program on the member's ability to put things on YouTube. We do it in a rational, calm and reasonable manner.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend church and aboriginal leaders joined in Saskatchewan to call on the Conservative government to issue a formal apology for the legacy of residential schools.

Time and again we have heard the minister say that an apology is forthcoming, after it said that it was not necessary. Now the government is dragging its feet.

Residential school survivors and aboriginal Canadians are waiting. Enough of the excuses, enough of the empty promises, when will the Conservative government apologize—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has followed through not only on residential schools settlement, something the previous government never got around to when it was in power.

We also approved and went ahead in the Speech from the Throne to say that we would make a meaningful, respectful apology to first nations about the residential schools era. We are working with church leaders, the Assembly of First Nations and others to ensure it is done in a meaningful and respectful way.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government is making responsible decisions that help Canadians save their hard-earned money.

The tax-free savings account unveiled in budget 2008 is a great new way for individuals to save tax free. To help make university or college more affordable for Canadian families, we have made major improvements to the registered education savings plan.

The changes made are fiscally responsible, unlike the Liberal plan that would send Canada into deficit.

Could the Minister of Finance inform how this will protect Canada from a Liberal deficit?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-253 is nothing but a Liberal effort to amend the government's budget without triggering an election. Budget 2008 contained an enriched savings plan already, the tax-free savings account.

The Liberal bill is an American style legislative tactic designed to threaten our balanced budget and plunge Canada back into deficit. The budget implementation legislation will deal with this issue shortly.

* * *

[Translation]

375TH ANNIVERSARY OF TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Trois-Rivières will celebrate its 375th anniversary next year. Quebec has announced a \$2 million contribution. The federal government is being asked to provide the same amount. The organizing committee cannot wait until the end of 2008 to draw up its budget. This is an untenable situation.

Will the government provide the assistance the organizing committee is asking for, as soon as possible?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 21, I had the opportunity to go to Trois-Rivières and announce to the city that it had been designated as a 2009 Cultural Capital of Canada. We also announced that by virtue of this designation, the city would receive up to \$2 million to help cover its needs, as most of its programming will centre around the 375th anniversary.

* * *

● (1500)

[English]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the world will see the launch of Dextre, Canada's latest contribution to the international space station. Like Dextre, RADARSTAT-2 is technology designed and built by Canadians in Canada with our tax dollars.

MDA's proposed sale of this technology is quickly proving to be a national security, economic and ethical nightmare.

Will the government live up to previous funding commitments in order to see MDA continue to thrive in Canada? Will the government declare clearly that the future of Canada's space program is not for sale?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us get to the facts. No approval has been granted. There is a process. The minister will go through this process and will inform Canadians when the process is finished.

ETHICS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works changed his story about his conversation with Mr. Lawrence Martin. Last week he said in the House that he never had discussed with Mr. Martin about the financial considerations that Mr. Cadman had in mind about the vote. He said that last week.

Why does he not repeat the same story this week? Is it because he knows he misled the House last week?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is that all they have? What I said last week in the House was that the element in the column was false, and it was false. I had no knowledge at the time of what happened at the May 19 meeting. We now know what happened. That element in the column was false. I said so again today. I have said that consistently.

However, the Leader of the Opposition has falsely accused the Prime Minister of our country of a crime. He should withdraw his accusation. He should apologize to the House, and he should stop embarrassing himself and the Liberal Party with these ridiculous, false accusations.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Dan—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: —no, Malpeque.

Order, please. The hon. member for Malpeque has the floor.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture did a little tour on P.E.I. last Friday to shore up his nominated candidates. However, in the process the minister insulted not only producers in Prince Edward Island, but all of Canada by telling them there would be no free ride for farmers. There has never been a free ride for farmers in our country. Farmers are the generators of wealth. The only problem is they do not share in terms of that wealth.

The minister has failed abysmally, cutting program spending by 33% in Prince Edward Island. Will the minister accept his responsibility and assist farmers today?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can understand your dilemma in trying to tell the difference between the member for Toronto—Danforth and the member for Malpeque. Farmers in western Canada have the same problem.

The one thing that came to light in our meetings in Prince Edward Island was that milling wheat in Prince Edward Island went for \$600 a tonne. Do members know what it is worth in Saskatchewan under the Canadian Wheat Board? Half of that.

Why does the member for Malpeque force western Canadian farmers to take half the money he gets for his farmers?

Routine Proceedings

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the Ladies Gallery of a group of boys and girls, the Children's Miracle Network 2008 Champions from across the country.

These youngsters have overcome life threatening illnesses or injuries and have been chosen to represent the millions of children who are treated annually by the Children's Miracle Network hospitals and foundations across North America.

[Translation]

These remarkable young people are true champions who have overcome some very serious obstacles to be with us here today.

Some hon. members: Bravo!

* * *

[English]

COMMONWEALTH DAY

The Speaker: I would also like to bring to the attention of hon. members that today is Commonwealth Day and that a message from Her Majesty has been received and will be read at a reception in Room 237-C this evening to which all hon. members are invited.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on the minister's non-appearance on the supplementary estimates.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages called "Leading by Example: Bilingualism in the Public Service and the Renewal of the Action Plan for Official Languages".

It constitutes an important contribution on the part of the committee to advancing the cause of bilingualism within the public service and across the country.

* * *

[English]

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC) moved that Bill S-201, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act and the Bank of Canada Act (quarterly financial reports), be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to sponsor Bill S-201, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act and the Bank of Canada Act.

Bill S-201 would allow parliamentarians to track the nation's expenditures by introducing quarterly reports that would allow for more effective management and accountability.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of residents of Calgary, Alberta, who remind the Prime Minister about his boasting of his commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud is a promise not kept. The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out \$25 billion of hard-earned savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

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

[Translation]

BILL C-482

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by nearly 400 people from Quebec City calling on the Government of Canada to pass Bill C-482, which requires the federal government to comply with the Charter of the French Language within the province of Quebec, and therefore to amend the Official Languages Act and include a provision in the Canada Labour Code requiring federally regulated

companies to comply with Bill 101 in Quebec and make French the language of work. This bill was introduced by the Bloc Québécois.

• (1510)

[English]

TAXATION

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table two petitions today.

The first petition is yet again on the urgent need for this House to pass Bill C-390. The bill would allow tradespeople and indentured apprentices to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable income so they could secure and maintain employment at construction sites that are more than 80 kilometres from their homes.

This time the petitions have come from Vancouver, New Westminster, Burnaby, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Guelph, Whitby, Oshawa, Orillia, Barrie, Peterborough, Thunder Bay, Laval, Dorval, Moncton, Shediac and River View in an expression of support that is truly national in scope. Unfortunately, another federal budget is now behind us and once again the building trades were ignored. All they have been asking for is some basic fairness.

I will continue to represent their issues in this House and will gladly introduce all of their petitions until the government finally lives up to its commitment to act.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the second petition this afternoon that arises out of my national campaign to fight for fairness for ordinary Canadians and in particular for seniors who were shortchanged by their government as a result of an error in calculating the rate of inflation. The government has acknowledged the mistake made by Statistics Canada but is refusing to take any remedial action.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to take full responsibility for this error, which negatively impacted their incomes from 2001 to 2006, and to take the required steps to repay every Canadian who has been shortchanged by a government program because of a miscalculation of the CPI.

The petitions are signed by hundreds of people from Hamilton, including an overwhelming number from my riding of Hamilton Mountain. The petitioners are people who have worked hard all their lives, have played by the rules and now are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. All the petitioners are asking for is a bit of fairness from their government.

It is a privilege to table this petition on their behalf.

STUDENT LOANS

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand here today and present a petition signed by many of the students from Laurentian University.

They are asking that the government consider giving large grants to those students who come from poor families. Tuition fees have increased tremendously and more students are relying on loans and it is extremely difficult for them to repay the loans when they graduate.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I would like to inform the House that under the provisions of Standing Order 30, I am designating Wednesday, March 12 as the day fixed for the consideration of private member's motion No. 310 standing in the order of precedence in the name of the hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo.

[*Translation*]

This additional private members' hour will take place immediately after the time for private members' business already planned for this day, after which the House will proceed to the adjournment debate pursuant to Standing Order 38.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Halifax had the floor for questions and comments consequent upon her speech. There are four minutes remaining in the time allotted for questions and comments to the hon. member for Halifax.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in her speech earlier today the member for Halifax addressed the whole question of the need for more initiatives around peacemaking, seeking peace and working toward peace in Afghanistan. I want to read a quote from Oxfam's "Community Peacebuilding in Afghanistan" report:

As Oxfam research shows, for the vast majority of Afghans, problems have local causes and people turn to local institutions and individuals to resolve them. Yet little work has been done with local institutions and other actors, especially with shuras, to enhance their capabilities to promote peace. Peace work at the community level strengthens community cohesion, reduces violence, and enhances resistance to militants.

Canada is talking about signature projects that will publicize the effort in Afghanistan, mainly to Canadians. We have seen how some of our aid in Afghanistan seems to have been primarily directed at bolstering the military effort, the road building efforts for instance,

Business of Supply

and not necessarily directed to what is good and best for the Afghan people.

I wonder if the member for Halifax could comment on what Oxfam says is a deficiency in our foreign aid commitment to Afghanistan.

• (1515)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I am going to invite all members to introduce themselves to the complete report, "Community Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: The Case for a National Strategy", authored by Matt Waldman of Oxfam International. I am sure they can find it on the website.

It is important for me not to do an unfair summary of the excellent proposal for what we should be doing instead, and in the very few moments left, I want not to use up my time to respond to the insults that were being hurled by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence during my speech today. Rather I would like to invite him and other members of the Liberal-Conservative alliance for continuing the Afghan counter-insurgency on a very brief tour of defence ministers and military leaders who have shown themselves more willing to face up to the reality of the hazards and the flaws in the counter-insurgency mission.

"Every time you kill an angry young man overseas, you're creating 15 more who will come after you" Who said that? Major General Andrew Leslie, former chief of the Canadian land staff. "I don't think Canada is winning the war, and this war is not winnable". Who said that? Retired Colonel Michel Drapeau.

Afghanistan is a "textbook case of how to screw up a counter-insurgency". Who said that? British Captain Leo Docherty. "The situation is deteriorating and...NATO forces risk appearing like an army of occupation." The Belgium defence minister said that. "One should not try to bury one's head in the sand...the operation is encountering real difficulties.... the situation is not improving." The French defence minister said that. "If...the international community cannot find a"— political solution—"...then...we have no moral right to ask our young people to expose themselves to that danger". Des Browne, the U.K. defence minister, said that.

I could go on. There are others who said much the same. A Dutch military commander said that ultimately, the key to defeating the counter-insurgency is political accommodation, and in Afghanistan, that means talking to the Taliban.

We have no moral right, as was suggested by many of these highly placed, experienced defence ministers and military leaders, to keep sending our young men and women to Afghanistan in a mission that is either going to jeopardize their lives or destroy their health for all time.

We need to get on a path to peace. We have to take the leadership necessary to do that. In doing so, we can regain the respect that countries around the world have had for Canada's traditional role of peace seeking, peace building and peacekeeping in our troubled world.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Business of Supply

I have a motion, for which there have been discussions among the parties. I would have made it earlier but I had not yet heard back from the NDP. We now have heard back from them, so I believe you hopefully will find support for this.

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, on Thursday, March 13, 2008, the House shall again consider Government Business No. 5 and, unless previously disposed of, at the expiry of time provided for Government Orders the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith, without further debate or amendment, every question necessary to dispose of Government Business No. 5.

That is, of course, the Afghanistan motion.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order, simply to explain our position. We indeed had some discussions, but we are considering the request at this time. We will get back to the government with an answer on this as soon as possible.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

I want to pick up on the comments by the member for Halifax. She referenced an Oxfam report entitled, “Community peacebuilding in Afghanistan: The case for a national strategy”. I, too, think it is well worth the read. It is an excellent analysis of part of the way forward.

As many commentators have noted, the government has essentially photocopied the Liberal position on the future role of Afghanistan, and largely, so to speak, the political sizzle has gone out of the debate. I am hoping that the government actually responds positively to this motion so that we can enter into a substantive conversation as to where we go in Afghanistan instead of this eternal game of gotcha politics, which is really just playing with men's and women's lives, those of our own men and women and those in Afghanistan.

Until recently, this exercise in gotcha politics has largely characterized the debate. I hope we can move off that to this motion for change. It really is a motion for change.

It is conditional upon getting another 1,000 troops. I hope the government answers the questions put forward by the leader of the Liberal Party with respect to why 1,000 troops should make a difference, what the significance is in the number of 1,000, what exactly the troops will do, and whether an extra 1,000 actually will make a difference in Afghanistan.

To be truthful, my expectations of improvement are not all that high, given that historically Afghanistan has long been the place where armies go to die and treasuries get depleted. In particular, in regard to Britain in the 18th century, I think there were two occupations, which ended in a rather unsatisfactory conclusion and

drained the exchequer of Great Britain. We also have the more recent example of the Russian invasion in the last 20 years, in the past generation. It, too, was a very unsatisfactory experience for the Russians. Now NATO is in Afghanistan and we have been there some seven years. Of course, the Americans have their own version in Iraq, where there is an insurgency which is very difficult to control and is in fact depleting their treasury.

Speaking of the NATO mission, the current mission in Afghanistan unfortunately has served to highlight some deep divisions among the NATO partners concerning the question of the appropriate role for the alliance in that desperate land. Despite the desperate state of affairs in that country, we still wish to believe that Afghans, like everyone else, wish to aspire to a greater sense of peace and security, much like other countries enjoy, and we are there because of that working assumption.

That hope is the basis on which I support the resolution going forward and that eventually we will improve the chances of the Afghan people realizing the standard of peace and prosperity. This is the main reason that I think this resolution needs to be supported going forward to 2011.

However, we should not be under any illusion that this is a war or an insurgency that can be won in a conventional sense, because the situation is a bit like a Hydra-headed monster. Once one element of the insurgency is dealt with, up pops another head. The unavoidable reality is that over the last three years the insurgency has increased. We have to ask some fundamental questions, which is the point of this debate, as to the best way to deploy our brave men and women in Afghanistan.

It is easy enough to talk about the 3Ds. We seem to talk about the 3Ds all the time. Over the past year certainly, and over the past seven years, the emphasis has been on the deployment of military forces to the neglect of the other two Ds. It has not been working as it should. I do not want people to get all defensive on me, but surely after seven years, which is, incidentally, longer than we were in World War II, we need to ask some pretty basic questions.

Afghanistan is an extremely complicated situation, mainly because it is a war on terror, and the war on terror is layered over a civil war, and the civil war is layered over tribal conflicts, and further, that is layered over personal disputes. It goes on and on.

• (1525)

We get a notion of perpetual fermenting conflict in all of these layers. I wonder where we would be today if, for the past seven years, we had put as much money into the other two Ds as we have put into defence. Maybe if we had, we now would actually be aspiring to bring our troops home.

In fact, Canada has no direct strategic interest in Afghanistan. We do not have any major businesses there. We do not have any resources that we are interested in. Essentially we are there to bring peace to the situation. Initially, we went in to help in the war on terror, but unfortunately, in the words of John Kerry, President Bush took “his eye off the ball”, and al-Qaeda, while defeated a number of years ago, still maintains some presence in this conflict.

Business of Supply

I want to mention, however, that I like the part of the resolution that shifts the emphasis of the mission, but it will be meaningful only if we put serious effort into conflict resolution among the Afghans themselves.

I want to share two stories that relate to peace-building. A well known NGO in Canada submitted a very detailed peace-building initiative to CIDA. Its members had a great deal of experience. They certainly know what they are talking about. They were prepared to put up their own resources. The submission was received by CIDA and returned to them with an offer of \$1,000 towards their initiative. Needless to say, that \$1,000 was declined. The NGO was somewhat insulted. Therein lies something of the tale as to why we are not dealing with peace-building, or serious peace-building, in this country.

The second story involves an elected senator in Afghanistan. He was to mediate a conflict between two tribes. Apparently there was a blood feud. I am not quite sure what it involved, but the solution was apparently to offer up two women from one tribe and give them to the other tribe. If in fact that is the level of conflict resolution in Afghanistan, is it any wonder that these layerings of conflict continue, whether it is a war on terror or inter-tribal conflicts, et cetera?

My view of the matter is that Canada and our NATO partners need to get serious about these kinds of peace-building initiatives. My point in sharing those two stories is to emphasize that unless these kinds of low level episodes of violence are not resolved in coherent and just ways, it is highly unlikely that we will ever see peace in Afghanistan, and I fear that our troops will be there forever.

Actually, I would amend the last statement. We probably will be there indefinitely until at some point we simply get fed up and walk away from it. I do not think that would be very good for us. I do not think it would be very good for the Afghan people. I do not think that would be very good for the stated goals that we have in being in Afghanistan.

What would a serious conflict resolution process look like?

First, I believe we have to be intentional about building capacity. I realize that is an overused word. It is a type of lingo in the NGO trade, but we really need to remember that this country has known nothing about conflict resolution for a very long time. Afghanistan is a place where institutions are in fact corrupt and where justice is quite clearly hit and miss, more miss than hit.

Second, capacity building is absolutely essential and it should be taught in Afghan schools, because we have to inculcate that view into the children of Afghanistan.

Third, it needs to be involved in everything we do there, including our deployment of troops. It needs to be involved in everything from aid to diplomacy to troop deployment.

To drive that point home, the fourth point is that we need to drive it into the heads of every Afghan official we meet, every political official, every politician, every warlord, every police officer, every judge, and every man, woman and child in that country.

● (1530)

I do not want to sound Pollyannaish, but unless we have peace-building from the ground up, then this will be a perpetual conflict. However, I do want to be recorded as supporting the fact that this is a motion for change. I hope this motion for change will go forward.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member from the Liberal caucus who just spoke for acknowledging what it appears the Conservatives, with whom the Liberals have entered into an alliance around supporting the continuation of the counter-insurgency war, are not willing to admit.

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood has quite correctly acknowledged that what we are seeing in Kandahar is not an improvement in the security situation but in fact a deterioration. He spoke about the recent Oxfam report, to which my colleague referred a few moments ago, “Community peacebuilding in Afghanistan”, in which it is absolutely acknowledged that security is deteriorating.

Red Cross officials have echoed those concerns and have talked about how really serious it is that NATO-sponsored provincial reconstruction teams often are treated with suspicion by Afghans, who believe that the teams are being controlled by foreign soldiers and so on. The UN has acknowledged 34 aid workers killed in the previous six months, with 76 abducted and 100 convoys and facilities looted. The UN World Food Programme reported that in the month of October alone 30 of its vehicles had been attacked and looted at a cost of \$750,000 in stolen aid, compared to just five such attacks in the previous 12 months.

Given that reality, how is it that the member and his colleagues feel comfortable and feel that it is a responsible thing to do to critically sign on to a continuation of that counter-insurgency mission in Kandahar instead of getting onto a solid path of building peace?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the insight of the member's question. We in the Liberal Party simply are not prepared to abandon our situation in Afghanistan, but I want the hon. member to note that there are clear timelines laid down for change in the characterization of the mission. I want this period of time, from now until 2011, to be used to change that whole view of how we do this mission.

Thus far, we have gone on a kind of linear basis, so to speak. First, we have to get the defence situation and security taken care of, then we provide aid, and after that diplomacy, or diplomacy and then the aid. We seem to want to go one, two and three. We always want to seem to put pacification first and then everything else afterwards.

I am advocating for a more holistic approach in which we continually do all three and also that resources be deployed in a far more substantial measure on aid and diplomacy, and that in fact peace-building becomes integrated into our entire deployment of our troops, so that it is not just simply security first and then we will worry about delivering aid afterwards. I appreciate that it is not an easy situation, but we do have to start somewhere. I only wish we had started seven years ago with this kind of initiative.

Business of Supply

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for his comments and for supporting an ongoing role for Canada in providing security in Afghanistan. I was pleased to hear that he himself, and I believe he committed for his party, would not abandon Afghanistan and would not abandon providing the kind of security that is required to continue the diplomatic efforts that are going on there as well as the huge job of rebuilding that country.

In order to make some progress, we are going to have to continue the job of reconstruction in that country and continue delivering humanitarian aid, but some people have proposed that there actually be a dialogue started between the Taliban and the ISAF forces to try to work toward some kind of an ongoing peace in Afghanistan.

Does the member himself believe that discussions with the Taliban and trying to work to some kind of a solution with them, and bringing them into that process, is advisable? Or does he believe that it would be counterproductive to rebuilding Afghanistan?

• (1535)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, in some respects, the hon. member's question is a touch simplistic, and I do not say that in an insulting sort of way. I simply think that having a war with the Taliban or having dialogue with the Taliban is a bit simplistic.

The argument that I hope I have made in the course of my speech is that peace-building needs to start with these tribal feuds, with these situations in which justice is very much an absent concept in Afghan civilization and dealing with those things. If that leads to conversations with Afghan leaders, some of whom may well be Taliban, so be it.

The only way in which we will create a situation for peace in that country is if we work from the ground up and develop actual peace-building initiatives on a small basis, whether it is intertribal or within provinces. Those are the kinds of civilized infrastructures that are required in order for peace and justice to prevail. If they do prevail, then there is some chance that the conflict will go down.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this debate on the motion concerning Canada's role in Afghanistan. We in the Liberal Party were pleased to see the government's position move closer to the principles we have been advocating for over a year now.

We are also pleased that the government chose to base its new motion on the Liberal motion presented roughly a month ago. Under the government's new motion the mission must change, must have an end and must go beyond an exclusively military objective. Those are the three principles the Liberal caucus, the official opposition in this House and the leader of the official opposition have been defending for more than a year.

Through this motion, the government finally recognizes that the mission must change to become a mission that includes security and also must include training for the Afghan military forces and police.

I would like to read from an open letter to the Prime Minister that the Leader of the Opposition, the Liberal leader, published on February 15, 2008. The letter addresses our conditions for the mission in Afghanistan.

Dear Prime Minister, we are in agreement that we cannot abandon the people of Afghanistan, as there remains much to be done to ensure that the stability and governance institutions are in place to allow Afghans themselves to resolve their differences. But Liberals recognize that Canada's mission has to change. We cannot simply continue to extend the same mission indefinitely. That is why we have provided the government with an alternative plan for the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. The Liberal plan is consistent with our longstanding position that Canada's mission in Kandahar must change in February 2009. It brings clarity to our goals in Afghanistan by placing a greater emphasis on stronger and more disciplined diplomatic efforts, and striking a better balance with respect to the reconstruction and development efforts that will be essential to creating a stable Afghanistan.

We, the Liberals, have been stressing and continue to stress today that the mission has to change. NATO must ensure that our troops are replaced in Kandahar province so that in February 2009 they can move on to a mission focused on training the Afghan army and police and on providing security for reconstruction projects.

As a follow-up to the Manley report, the government is telling us now that an additional 1,000 soldiers are needed. They do not say anywhere, though, how they arrive at this figure. Why not another 500, 2,000, or 5,000 soldiers?

We have heard armed forces personnel and army representatives say that about another 7,000 soldiers would be needed, but the Conservative government only talks about 1,000.

• (1540)

Since the government introduced its first motion and then its amended motion following the Liberal one, the leader of the official opposition and several of my colleagues, who have already risen in this debate, have been asking the government to explain this figure of 1,000 soldiers. What will be accomplished with another 1,000 soldiers? Will they be able to guarantee success, the stabilization and security of the province? If so, how did the government arrive at this figure? What studies were done? By whom and when? What consultations were held? We have been asking these questions since the government tabled its motion but we are still waiting for the answers.

We are told the mission must include a rotation of our Canadian troops so that they play some role other than simply combat. The government has been talking about providing training for the Afghan army and police and security for reconstruction projects. Why? As the colleague who preceded me said, we need the three Ds: diplomacy, defence and development. One is no good without the others. We cannot succeed at defence without diplomacy and development.

In order for Afghan society to stabilize and start to develop its economy and flourish, it will need stable institutions with rules, procedures and well trained personnel. This requires a population that accepts these institutions and considers them credible, whether it is the justice system or the taxation system or the government itself that determines the laws and regulations. The Afghan people must believe that their institutions are credible and objective. To achieve this requires diplomacy as much as defence or development.

Business of Supply

Canada has a fine reputation around the world for development, especially the creation, expansion and capacity building of institutions. Many new democracies ask for our help with their police, legal system and judiciary, for example, to find out how to establish an objective, unbiased, well trained judiciary that can interpret the laws. Canada is also often asked to provide training for new parliamentarians.

When I was in my second year as a member of Parliament, I was asked to go to Vietnam and provide training courses. They were to show female MPs how to be good parliamentarians and represent their constituents. That is the kind of project we should be doing in various countries.

The mission in Afghanistan must have an end point, and before it ends, it must change. We must have a better balance between the military sector and reconstruction, development, diplomacy and defence.

We hope the government will provide serious answers to the questions we have been asking about the reasoning behind certain aspects of its motion.

● (1545)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her contributions to this debate and her reference to her previous experience in helping other female parliamentarians is commendable.

She would know that with the recent marking of International Women's Day we had here in Canada and here in these buildings six female parliamentarians who serve in the parliament of Afghanistan, democratically elected, courageous women with inspirational stories in fact.

We heard over the weekend that there were 1,000 women who turned out to celebrate. On this momentous occasion of International Women's Day in Afghanistan, as the member would know, this would be completely unheard of just a few short years ago.

I guess it is those obvious indications of democratization, the freedoms that women are now enjoying. They are hard fought, hard won, and clearly there is more to do.

I have a number of questions for the hon. member. Does she in fact see the ability of future missions, like the one she referenced in Vietnam, where parliamentarians and others from other participating nations, NATO, UN, could similarly undertake that type of work? Would they be able to do that without the increased security that is required and that is absolutely integral for the furtherance of the development, the reconstruction and the democratization that is underway in Afghanistan today? Is that possible without the security component?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I was quite clear when I said Liberals believe that there has to be a balance between defence, diplomacy and development. One cannot have one without the other.

One of the reasons why our democracy here in Canada is so successful is precisely because we have that balance. We have a prosperous society. We have institutions which are credible and

which people believe in and participate in actively, and we have a military that has the support of the Canadian people.

Therefore, it is not one opposed to the other. If we were to only have the defence side, then we would risk the population, the grassroots, losing any or a great deal of respect for the military that is there.

It is a combination of all three: defence, diplomacy, development. We have to find that balance. We Liberals believe that with the motion that we had presented, and which the government has largely adopted, the balance is there.

● (1550)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague, and I would like to ask her a question, the same question I asked the government last week and a minister this morning.

I do not think that the text of the motion is the same in both languages. I am sure my colleague will agree that in the French version, following all of the items listed after “attendu que”, or “whereas” in English, the motion gets to the important things: the conditions. This motion sets out conditions; it creates obligations.

In the French version, when referring to the panel's recommendations, it says “—que, en vertu de ce mandat,...soit approuvé par la Chambre à la condition expresse que—”. The English version says “that, consistent with this mandate,...is approved by this House expressly on the condition that—”. What follows is a list of conditions. But then, when the motion refers to other conditions for accountability and transparency, the conditional is used: “—que la contribution du Canada à la reconstruction et au développement de l’Afghanistan devrait être—”. The English version uses the verb “should”. The following paragraph begins “—que le Canada devrait adopter—”. In English, this is given as “—that Canada should assert —”.

Personally, I find this very worrying because it implies that we have to trust the government. I would therefore ask my colleague if we really have good reason to believe that if this motion is passed, the government, the armed forces and other bodies involved will make a sincere effort to respect the conditions and obligations as written, whether in the conditional tense or otherwise.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, the answer is quite simple. The Conservative government has accepted the fact that our presence in Afghanistan must not be limited to military action and that the development and diplomacy commitments that were lacking in the government's original motion were taken straight from the Liberal motion. However, it is up to us to make sure that the government acts. That is clear.

With this new government motion, Canadians understand that the government has agreed to the three principles set out by the official opposition, the Liberal Party: the mission must change, the mission must end, and the mission must strike a better balance between defence, diplomacy and development. It will then be up to us—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Business of Supply

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate and I congratulate all members who have participated. I am pleased to be splitting my time with the Minister of Public Safety.

This debate, as we know, focuses on Canada's role in the United Nations' mandated NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, a mission that, of course, has the full support and encouragement of the democratically elected government of that country. As before, Canada was called in a time of dire need and we answered.

When one thinks of the contribution that is being made, it is difficult not to feel pride each time we have a discussion in this chamber, and the fact that we represent Canadians who are very engaged and very interested in Canada's mission in the future role that we can play in Afghanistan.

Indeed, Afghanistan's success may be determined very much by Canada's future role. In fact, Canadians have demonstrated, I would say, a profound understanding and an interest of the mission taking place on the other side of the world.

The combined efforts of numerous government departments are doing incredible work in building peace and prosperity in Afghanistan that it strives for. It is critical that they remain engaged in a whole-of-government approach because clearly we are shaping the 21st century for the people of Afghanistan through our actions and efforts, promoting values of freedom, security, peace, the rule of law and democracy. This is a possibility where before it was simply an impossibility.

I spoke recently at the Forum for Young Canadians, Mr. Speaker, and I know you have on numerous occasions. I was taken by the insights and the penetrating questions that came from those young representatives from across our country. I felt particularly proud to hear the understanding that they had for what was taking place in places like Afghanistan, Darfur, and other parts of the world where Canada is making such a genuine and positive contribution. The generation that I saw is a hopeful and thoughtful one.

[Translation]

Canadians have always been proud of our tradition of reaching out and helping the less fortunate.

The international mission in Afghanistan is part of this tradition. Nevertheless, it differs from the missions our military has participated in in the past. This has raised some serious questions for our country.

Our government has always been open to frank and transparent discussions about this mission. There have been 15 technical briefings since 2002, and 14 of those were held under the current Conservative government. I have appeared before standing committees to discuss my current and former portfolios. In total, the former defence minister and I have appeared 17 times. Take note debates have been held and many questions have been raised in the House.

The independent panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan played an important role in educating Canadians about the Afghan mission. The task force developed clear, fair and balanced

recommendations. The government motion to extend Canada's military mission in Kandahar until July 2011 stems from these recommendations.

● (1555)

[English]

I and others have followed the debate on the future contributions in Kabul. We would like to take the opportunity today to answer some of the questions that were posed by members in today's debate and others. I also want to thank the participants, as I did a moment ago. I believe that the contributions are doing a lot to help inform Canadians further on the role that we are playing and no doubt raising the standard of debate on the issue itself.

The role Canadians are playing is one of which we can all be proud. Today, in Afghanistan, approximately 2,500 Canadian Forces members have joined with the forces of other countries who have answered the call of the international community to bring security to that country.

Canadian troops are there working side by side with their counterparts, among others, the Department of Foreign Affairs, CIDA, Correctional Service Canada and the RCMP. Canadian men and women are contributing in almost all areas of Afghan life, from education and health to community development, and the training of Afghan security forces. They do it well, with cultural sensitivity and recognizing the tribal nature of Afghan society. We are making a difference there.

Afghanistan is the largest recipient of Canadian bilateral development assistance. Our pledge of \$1.3 billion to 2011 for development and reconstruction ranks Canada among the world's top donors.

My colleague, the Minister of International Cooperation, has outlined for the House some of the important development work that is ongoing.

With perseverance, commitment and patience, we are rebuilding a country that was devastated by decades of war and hardship, and the Afghan population has endured such hardship. Yet, we continue to hear the stories of commitment and courage.

As I mentioned, the Afghan female members of Parliament were here, setting such a high standard and example for women in their country and our own.

This past weekend 1,000 women gathered in Kandahar to celebrate International Women's Day. This would have been unthinkable just a few short years ago.

Success in Afghanistan is very much dependent on the establishment of self-sufficiency in three key areas: security, obviously, development and governance. These three areas are mutually reinforcing, and are nurtured and supported by the Afghanistan Compact, but of the three, the achieving of security is the rock upon which all else will be moored.

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The Afghanistan Compact is a landmark five year agreement between the United Nations, the international community and the government of Afghanistan. It maps out Afghanistan's road to recovery and governs most of what Canada and the 59 other signatory countries and organizations will be doing in Afghanistan.

With Canada and the international assistance, Afghanistan is making real progress toward achieving these benchmarks that are set by the compact. Not surprisingly then, many of the answers to the questions that have been posed in this debate can be derived directly from this document.

In order to meet the benchmarks set out by the Afghan Compact, we must surely assist the Afghan national security forces to establish a stable and secure environment in that country. That is why the troops are there. This government believes that they need to stay there until the Afghans are in a better position to take over this role for themselves.

In fact, the motion put forth by the government states things clearly. The mission should shift increasingly toward training the Afghan national security forces, so they can assume increased responsibility for security in Kandahar and in their entire country.

This training has always been a key element of our military engagement there. In fact, when one looks over the history of this mission, we have been engaged in increasing levels of training since we signalled our intentions last October in the Speech from the Throne.

We are glad that the Manley report reinforces this sentiment and that members here have also signalled agreement with the direction that we have already been moving.

Canada has contributed significantly to the development of a self-sufficient and effective national army in Afghanistan, and particularly the Afghan government, along with the international security assistance force, has called for an 80,000 strong Afghan national army by 2010.

There have been noteworthy successes, operational wins, which involve the active participation of the Afghan national army.

Should the mandate be extended beyond February 2009? We expect that our men and women in uniform will continue to work with the Afghan government and our allies toward achieving the other benchmarks, but particularly in the areas of training the security forces within the Afghan national security forces and their ability to engage or take on the extremists, the Taliban. Without that, we will not have success.

The Taliban are ferocious and fearless, and unrestricted in the tactics they will employ. They perpetrate the most hideous and immoral forms of violence imaginable, and that is their hallmark and their advantage.

We cannot cede any territory or back away. We win on the battlefield. IEDs are the type of system that has been employed and we are taking steps to counter these insidious forms of warfare.

● (1600)

As the security improves, the Canadian Forces will be in a better position to dedicate more resources to the building of a self-

sustaining Afghan national army and police force. I know my colleague will have more to say on that subject.

Through its six operational mentoring and liaison teams, the Canadian Forces are focusing on training the Afghan brigade based in Kandahar province to plan and execute operations in the field. Because of Canadian efforts, competent Afghan national battalions are now deploying into Kandahar province and throughout the country. Afghans are increasingly able to plan and execute their own operations with the support of ISAF troops. Continued mentoring and training will be required to further develop professional and competent Afghan national security forces.

The Afghan national security forces are the antidote to the Taliban terrorists. Let us not forget the atrocities committed against the Afghan people and their pain and suffering.

Numerous mention has been made throughout the debate and found within this motion of the troop commitments, the equipment that is required. These are very much consistent with the recommendations of the Manley report. We have already announced our intention to acquire helicopters, both in the broader sense through the commitment in the budget and also to work to obtain UAVs and address the immediate needs on the equipment side.

We are also looking at achieving other objectives, including the emphasis that I mentioned as far as the training. The government will continue to work to get the troops what they need, when they need it. They are the best ones to give us that advice.

Canadian parents, sons and daughters expect that their government will support their loved ones, who are willingly accepting the risk and putting their lives on the line to work with others. We have listened to the Canadian Forces, its leadership and those who use this important equipment to make these determinations. We are committed to getting that equipment to those people who need it most.

Peace, stability and security are achievable in Afghanistan if we continue to work together in this international mission. We believe we can elevate the development, the reconstruction and good governance. These are all realistic goals, but only if we persevere.

● (1605)

[*Translation*]

I hope my comments have clarified the issue and helped to better explain the government's position.

We must understand the issues related to this mission, which is important to Afghans and to Canadians. We are helping lead the way for the Afghan people, but we are also making a decision about the kind of leadership we want to provide internationally. We are facing some serious challenges in Afghanistan. We can turn our backs and run away, but that does not fit into the Canadian tradition.

[*English*]

I thank the House for the opportunity to speak to this important issue. I am grateful for the attention that Parliament itself and the people of Canada have focused now on the issue of the mission in Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

I reiterate that we hope all members will consider support for this motion. Given that capacity, we believe Afghanistan will continue on the path to peace and the people of Afghanistan and the people of Canada will be direct beneficiaries of that united effort.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a misunderstanding is being perpetrated in the House, and I believe intentionally, by some members about NATO being military only. Would the minister like to comment on some of the other areas that NATO operates in and some other capabilities it brings to a mission like Afghanistan that are more than simply military operations?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, it is a very insightful question and I commend my colleague from Edmonton, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. He has a lifelong understanding of the military and, in particular, has participated in NATO exercises.

NATO, a 26 member organization, with participation in Afghanistan of other non-NATO countries, is focusing on many aspects above and beyond simply the military one. Clearly it is enabling much of the development that is happening in the country. Much of the reconstruction and humanitarian aid work is happening only because of the efforts of NATO.

The construction of roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, the provision of humanitarian aid, the provision of the enablers that allow for the transportation of injured individuals, medical treatment for Afghans, vaccinations, education, commerce, all of that is very much attributable to the work that Afghanistan people are now able to enjoy because of the NATO contribution. NATO is not solely involved in the mission in Afghanistan. It is doing similar work around the world.

It is important, as the member has pointed out, to state, again, emphatically that NATO, just as the Canadian mission, is focused on far more than the provision of security. It goes well beyond that. However, clearly there is an inextricable connection between the elevated security and the elevated aid work and contributions that are made through other agencies.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the report of the independent advisory panel on the Afghan mission, which was chaired by my colleague, John Manley, recommended that the mission not be extended unless 1,000 new NATO troops were put into the mix. There were some equipment requirements as well, that should be a contingent factor.

First, do you know where the 1,000 troops came from, what is—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sure the hon. member does not expect me to know. Perhaps he could ask whether the minister knows rather than addressing the Chair.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, would the minister know from where the figure of 1,000 additional troops came? I agree it should be a requirement to have that rotation before Canada would extend beyond 2009. However, I have also heard some reports from military experts who say that the influx of troops should be more in the order of 5,000 to 10,000 troops into the Kandahar region.

Could he comment on the 1,000? I know the government has endorsed that panel's report, but will the 1,000 be adequate to do the job?

Second, could he comment on where the discussions are with NATO with respect to NATO coming up with the called for additional troops and the equipment?

• (1610)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I would say in advance that we appreciate the support of the member opposite and his party. Perhaps the biggest contribution the Liberal Party made to this debate was the work that was done by former deputy prime minister John Manley.

He and the panel were the source of this 1,000 troops. I presume, and I have had discussions with Mr. Manley on the subject, that the 1,000 troops is a recommendation that they received from their consultations, extensive as they were, with NATO and military personnel in theatre and with military personnel in Canada. Clearly we are always going to require more when one looks at the enormity of the challenge, more aid work, more development, more security. Therefore, many commentators will say the number perhaps should be higher.

I point out for the member opposite that we will receive the support of 3,200 marines starting this month in Afghanistan, 2,000 specifically earmarked for Kandahar province. That will be an enormous contribution albeit for a time limited period of seven months. However, I am confident the discussions we are having with NATO are going to yield more soldiers, more contributions to Kandahar province to meet the February 2009 timetable that has been set for the provision of other troops.

I am also very confident that Canada's position is well known. The NATO allies have been approached directly by myself and others repeatedly at international conferences. I know the Minister of Foreign Affairs has just returned from discussions in Brussels. I am confident we will meet those commitments as outlined in this motion.

Again, I thank the member for his contributions to this debate.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by my hon. colleague, the Minister of National Defence, in articulating the case for the motion before the House and also recounting for us some of the contributions that have been made in Afghanistan, certainly by the military but also other agencies.

It is very important that we recall why we are there in the first place, as the Minister of National Defence already eloquently articulated. Post-1989 there was a political vacuum in Afghanistan. As we know, just as physical nature abhors a vacuum, so does a political nature. A vacuum was created because of the preceding 10 years before 1989, from the 1979 historic and the somewhat horrific invasion of the U.S.S.R. and Russian forces into Afghanistan, occupying and maintaining somewhat of a reign of terror in that land for about 10 years.

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As a result of the heroic struggle of the Afghan people in resisting that and wearing down the Russian forces, the U.S.S.R. moved out of there in 1989. Unfortunately, then in that particular vacuum, again it was the most vicious and the most powerful groups that would rise to power. They eventually became the organization known as the Taliban. They are ultra extremist fundamentalists who use any tactic and every tactic imaginable of both terror and horror to promote their single-minded agenda. In doing that, the litany of their tragic methods is legend and it is something which, when talked about, horrifies any reasonable human being. They used and still use methods such as training of and sending their suicide bombers into groups. They deliberately target groups of children wherein soldiers hand out candy to them, as has happened in the past.

They go into towns, villages and rural areas and with the most vicious of tactics subdue the local population. They behead elderly women, severe limbs and torture methods. Anything that the human mind could imagine as being horrific has been and continues to where possible be perpetrated by the Taliban.

The cry of the Afghan people was heard. It was heard as far away as the United Nations. It was the United Nations that mandated this mission. Therefore, for those in the House who have concerns and would say that we should immediately leave, and I know the Liberals do not say this but others do, is somewhat in defiance of a UN mandate, that a coalition, principally headed by NATO, to help the people of Afghanistan push back the Taliban to the place where things can be stabilized and the people then can move to develop a democracy that meets their needs and is suitable to them.

I know there was a great excitement over the elections in Afghanistan a few years ago. They were the first ever in their entire history, which goes back as we know many centuries of wartorn history. When people try to diminish the effect of that and how powerful it was, it is good to remember this.

At the time the elections were held in Afghanistan, it was about the time of the 2004 elections in Canada. Under threat in some cases of literally being murdered, people still voted in the elections in Afghanistan. In fact, they turned out in a bigger number percentage wise than Canadians did in our election. In doing so, they elected a higher percentage of women to parliament than we have in Canada. It was a remarkable first step and one that needs to be fortified and supported so they can develop along the lines that will best meet their needs.

We have seen some very positive changes in Afghanistan. While this is talked about a lot, often it is not reported as much as it could be. The GDP continues to rise in that country year to year. They are an impoverished nation but relatively speaking there is improvement there. On the health care side, polio was once rampant in that land. Five million children have been inoculated from polio since our involvement there. Health care centres and schools have been established. It is a long journey, but it has all the signs that the journey is paying off.

•(1615)

I would like to point to two particular agencies under the auspices of public safety that have had some positive effect. One is the RCMP which has 17 officers deployed, principally into the Kandahar area, but also in a few other areas. They have been very effective in

working with the Afghan national police. They have developed, along with our NATO partners, a training program. The RCMP have now trained some 615 Afghan national police officers in basic policing and in recognizing the importance of human rights. Some 2,500 uniforms have been delivered to these people.

In different parts of Canada, there has been some sense of wanting to support that. As one example, the volunteer fire department in the community of Langford, British Columbia, has donated over \$400,000 worth of equipment to first responders in Kandahar. So some exciting things are happening there.

On the correction side, we hear a lot of concerns related to the Taliban who in battle are captured or arrested in different situations. These terrorists are in jails in Afghanistan. In Kandahar, where we have our corrections officers, there has been great progress in impressing on the minds of the Afghanistan people that all individuals, even criminals, have certain basic rights and certain human rights that need to be respected even when in a corrections system.

Canada, of course, has a great record of exemplifying that within our own system and that is why people from around the world come to Canada to look at how we do corrections here.

We have three corrections officers who worked here in Canada and yet volunteered to go to Afghanistan, into a very dangerous neighbourhood and at some great personal risk, to offer up their advice where possible and offer mentoring programs to the people running the corrections system in Afghanistan.

Some of their accomplishments have included being a part of a group of individuals and a group of countries who have convinced Afghanistan officials and the government to move the whole area of corrections from the department of the interior, which is basically their security side, to the department of justice. That is to put the emphasis on the fact that human rights must be respected and, yes, even when dealing with possible terrorists and criminals, those rights need to be protected. They cannot permit things like torture. They need to allow for the basic needs of individuals.

I can say that the input of our three individuals there has resulted in a number of recommendations that are being followed and implemented, with improvements to the infrastructure in the prisons. A system has been established of reporting, whereby the prisoners are catalogued and their concerns are registered. If there are any concerns related to what is going on in the prison itself, those are logged in and passed on to the Afghan officials, where it should be passed on, to deal with and to monitor. Therefore, we can see that there is considerable progress that has been made, even in the corrections system.

I want to acknowledge the work of the RCMP and our corrections officers in both being diligent and, I might add, somewhat courageous in ensuring that the situation in Afghanistan continues to improve.

Business of Supply

I would ask people, certainly in the House, but even across the country to realize that these types of changes do not happen overnight. If we look at history in the second world war, for instance, with Japan, it was a good number of years that allied forces stayed in Japan after its surrender before things were established. Japan was a country that already had a history of democracy and internally did not have a ravaging force like the Taliban trying to destroy everything that was being accomplished.

Post-war Germany took many years. Allied forces stayed in that country many years to see things stabilized. Again, that country already had a history of democracy and was not dealing internally with any significant force from within that was trying to destroy everything that was good and right from a human point of view.

Those are examples of two countries where allied forces spent many years stabilizing and now they are among the most productive and most robust democratic countries in the world today.

• (1620)

We need to allow time for things to happen. We need to continue to hear the cry of the Afghan people, as Canadians have heard the cries from other peoples in the past in our own development. I look for the support of this motion from all members in the House.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Public Safety.

Something puzzles me somewhat. With all the controversy about the detainees in Afghanistan being turned over to the Afghani or U.S. authorities and concerns about them being in conditions that most people would think are not terribly favourable, such as being tortured or whatever, I wonder if the Government of Canada has ever looked at the feasibility of putting up its own correctional facility in Afghanistan.

Normally I would not ask that question because I had assumed it would be an enormous cost, but there was an article in some newspaper that had gone to a website and extracted information showing that a very suitable and appropriate correctional facility or holding tank could be constructed by the Canadian government in Afghanistan at a very low cost.

I do not know if it is feasible but with all the controversy and concern by Canadians and the international community about the way that prisoners in Afghanistan could be treated once they are handed over by Canadian military people to the Afghani authorities, the Americans or others, I wonder if the minister has looked at the feasibility of that particular alternative.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I do not question the intent of the inquiry from my hon. friend but we should keep in mind a couple of things.

First, in the preface to his question, I believe he made the suggestion that at times we hand over suspected terrorists to the American authorities but, of course, we do not do that. I just wanted to clarify that. I do not think he meant that but I wanted to clarify that for the record.

Second, it is not our policy to be building Canadian jails or taking responsibility for Canadian detention centres in Afghanistan. In fact,

that is something the Afghans need to do themselves as it is a matter of their own sovereignty.

If we were to do that, I am sure we would be quickly categorized as the Americans have been with its facility in Guantanamo Bay. I can imagine the type of pressure and critique we would be under if we were to do something like that. We are there to assist the people of Afghanistan, its administration and security forces to know and understand what it is to build an effective corrections capability.

Sometimes when we use the word “detainee”, it almost has a benign sound to it. These are not people being accused of jaywalking. These are people who are, in many cases, being accused of the most outrageous atrocities against fellow human beings. It is a very tenuous situation and one in which the Afghan people, as I indicated in my remarks earlier, are already showing an increased capacity, in a humane and effective way, to hold these individuals until they can be brought to justice.

• (1625)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the public safety minister assert that the security situation is much improved.

It is, therefore, not totally surprising to me that he will not listen to the position, the views and the information that the New Democratic Party brings forward on this issue. What is surprising is that he rejects the very contrary view that has been expressed and documented by the World Food Programme, the International Red Cross, Oxfam International and the United Nations itself. Apparently, the minister is not prepared to listen to that evidence either.

I would like to ask him to comment, if I could, on the position expressed by the U.K. defence minister when he stated:

A peaceful, developed Helmand cannot be won by the sword, and the longer we try, the greater the tragedy.

The Belgium defence minister stated:

The situation is deteriorating,...and, over time, NATO forces risk appearing like an army of occupation.

The French defence minister stated:

One should not try to bury one's head in the sand...the operation...is encountering real difficulties...the situation is not improving,

Could I ask the minister to—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I certainly have not presented a rosy picture of what is happening in Afghanistan. My remarks, if the member had been listening at all, would have suggested that this is a long process and not an easy one.

Just as I did not present a rosy one, I did not expect the member opposite, from her previous positions, to suggest that nothing good at all was going on in Afghanistan. I wish she had been present to hear the female members of parliament from Afghanistan who were here just last week thanking Canadians for their great contribution, in fact a contribution of the highest sacrifice in terms of Canadian lives at times, and talked about the progress there.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Etobicoke North.

[*English*]

As we discuss the future of Canada's military role in Afghanistan, I am pleased to have this opportunity today to add my thoughts and comments to this very important issue.

My constituents have provided me with a great deal of feedback and correspondence regarding Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan and, as the member of Parliament for Nipissing—Timiskaming, it is my duty to ensure that these voices are heard.

My constituents have made it explicitly clear that Canada's mission in Afghanistan must change and that the government must commit to a firm end date for this mission.

There is no question that the mission that the Canadian Forces are currently undertaking in Afghanistan is vitally important for the future of that country and the security of Canada. Nevertheless, sanctioning a never-ending combat role for our troops is simply unacceptable.

When the Prime Minister and his Conservative government first introduced their draft resolution a few weeks ago, it did not include many of the Manley panel's recommendations, such as improved diplomatic efforts, a better balance with respect to reconstruction and development efforts or the need for greater accountability by the government on the process of the mission.

The motion did not address important issues Liberals have been concerned about for over a year, such as the safe transfer of Afghan detainees, the cultivation of opium in Afghanistan or fixing the way the government manages the mission here in Ottawa.

However, the most significant problem with this motion is that it did not respect our position that the combat mission should end in February 2009.

When it became apparent that we could not count on the Prime Minister to show leadership on this issue, the Liberals put forward an amendment that incorporates the views expressed by thousands of Canadians coast to coast. The new motion adopts principles that the mission must change, that it must end and that it must go well beyond an exclusive military focus, principles that the Liberal Party has been calling for over the past year.

With this motion, the government is ensuring that the description of the mission after February 2009 will change in focus to a mission of training, security and reconstruction. Furthermore, this motion sets a firm end date to Canada's mission in Kandahar of July 2011.

Canadians from coast to coast agree that our presence in Afghanistan must be about more than military. They are looking to the government to ensure that the key commitments on development and diplomacy are included in the new motion.

The government must also recognize the need for greater transparency and accountability to Parliament. This includes important provisions with respect to the transfer of detainees.

While my Liberal colleagues and I remain hopeful that many of these concerns will be addressed in the new motion put forward by the Conservatives, what we are looking for now is a firm commitment from the Conservative government to support the following three conditions of the Liberal amendment: one, the Government of Canada must immediately notify NATO that Canada will end its military presence in Kandahar as of February 1, 2011 and, as of that date, the deployment of Canadian Forces troops out of Kandahar will start as soon as possible so that it will be completed by July 1, 2011; two, NATO must ensure troops to rotate into Kandahar to allow Canadian troops to be deployed pursuant to the mission priorities of training and reconstruction; and three, the government must secure medium helicopter lift and high performance, unmanned aerial vehicles.

Furthermore, in order to move forward and build a better future for the people of Afghanistan, my Liberal colleagues and I believe that after February 2009, Canada's mission in Afghanistan should consist of the following: training the Afghan national security forces; providing security for reconstruction and development projects in Kandahar; and the continuation of Canada's responsibility for the Kandahar provincial reconstruction team.

The Liberal amendment to the Afghanistan motion also calls for Canada's contribution to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan to be revamped and increased to strike a better balance between military efforts and our development efforts in Afghanistan; to focus on our traditional strengths as a nation, particularly through the development of a sound judicial and correctional system and strong political institutions on the ground in Afghanistan, and the pursuit of a greater role for Canada in addressing the chronic freshwater shortage in that country; to address the crippling issues of the narco-economy that consistently undermines progress in Afghanistan through the pursuit of solutions that do not further alienate the goodwill of the local population; and, to be held at a greater level of accountability and scrutiny so that Canadian people can be sure that our development contributions are being spent effectively in Afghanistan.

• (1630)

The Liberal amendment also calls for a stronger and more disciplined diplomatic position regarding Afghanistan and the regional players, including the naming of a special Canadian envoy to the region, who could ensure greater coherence in Canada's diplomatic initiatives in the region and also press for greater coordination among the partners in the UN in the pursuit of common diplomatic goals in the region.

On the issue of transparency, our amendment also calls for quarterly reports on the progress of the mission to be tabled in Parliament, and it calls on the ministers of foreign affairs, international cooperation, and national defence to take on monthly appearances before a parliamentary committee.

In short, the four issues that must be addressed are the following: First, we need to clarify our commitment. Second, we need to better integrate our military and aid efforts in Kandahar. Third, we need to focus on the very salient problem of the opium economy. Fourth, we must address the chronic shortage of fresh water.

Business of Supply

As Canadians we must remain committed to the Afghan people in the reconstruction of their country and their society. It is with that goal in mind that my Liberal colleagues and I are committed to a principled and constructive way forward on Canada's Afghan mission.

Under the Conservative government the Afghan mission has changed in both structure and purpose. The Conservatives have focused almost exclusively on military aspects of the mission, abandoning diplomacy and development. The time has come to ensure that the three D approach, which is rooted in the three fundamental pillars of diplomacy, defence, and development, is re-established as the primary mission of Canada's troops in Afghanistan.

While I believe that most members of this House support the courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces wherever they are serving on behalf of Canada, the needless politicization of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan must end. Canadians are worried about our role in Afghanistan. The best way that we as parliamentarians can demonstrate our support for our brave men and women in uniform wherever they are serving on behalf of Canada is to ensure that the conditions are such that their mandate work is achieving results.

• (1635)

[Translation]

When I was in Afghanistan in October 2005, I had the opportunity to meet some Afghan citizens. I saw the people in Kabul and Kandahar, and I saw a huge difference between those two regions. In Kabul, people were working and children were going to school, not just boys, but girls as well. But I did not see the same thing in Kandahar.

I would like to see the same thing in the south. This development has begun, and it will continue. Security is one of the issues we must address, but it is not the only issue. Security is essential, but development and diplomacy are also needed so that Afghanistan can have a stable democratic political regime and people can live in a free and democratic country and can move forward and be proud to be Afghans.

In this way, the Afghans will become Canada's allies, people we can do business with. This will not happen overnight. It will happen with time, and it is something we will have to work at.

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to read a letter from a medical intern, Dr. Bashir Ahmad, at Herat University in Afghanistan. The member talked about leaving Afghanistan. That seemed to be the focus of his speech. I would like my colleague to respond to this letter:

Afghan pleads for Canadian help

Afghanistan is my home. And it's a bitter reality to me, but we need external assistance to keep our country peaceful. People here are worried about rumours that international forces are planning to leave Afghanistan. If international forces leave, the future for us Afghans will go as well. There is hope in Afghanistan, but this hope depends on how strong the international commitment is. The involvement of the international community, including Canada, means more peace and security here. Will the rest of the world be safe if Afghanistan is left in the hands of destructive forces? Our enemies do not recognize borders; if they win in Afghanistan, they will

turn it into a base to attack the rest of the world. So continued international commitment in Afghanistan is something that must be done for the sake of a more secure and peaceful world.

That is a plea for Canadian help. I would like to hear what the member has to say about that.

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, that is a fair question and a good question.

Am I advocating running out of Afghanistan as soon as we can? No. What I am looking at is giving fair warning to our NATO allies who are in Afghanistan. I am not saying to pull out NATO.

When I look at Afghanistan I see a country that is in disarray and needs help. I am saying that our only role is not one of defence. In Afghanistan there is a multilateral force in place. We have to look at the concept of rotation, people going in and out. Kandahar is tumultuous. It is violent. It is tough. I am saying that there are other countries that should be stepping up to the plate. We have to give notice to NATO early enough so that it can replace the people we will be taking out and putting somewhere else.

In the long term, Afghanistan is going to need a lot of help in diplomacy and security.

We have to pull out the combat mission from Kandahar and move our troops somewhere else, into some other peacekeeping area, and concentrate on development. What the hon. member was speaking of was the development that is coming with that occupation. We want to see democracy develop. We want to see a government develop so that it can cover its own issues. It is important that we get Afghans to stand on their own two feet and make sure that they take care of Afghanistan for themselves. They do need help at this time and we are there to help them.

• (1640)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that the member is going to support our government's motion, or he is certainly inclined to do so.

I was concerned about one statement he made. He made an almost categorical statement that all of Canada's efforts have been focused on military intervention and very little on development and diplomacy. I think he knows that is not correct.

I want to remind him that six million children are now going to school in Afghanistan, two million of whom are girls. Girls were never allowed to go to school under the previous Taliban regime. There are thousands of miles of roads. Through CIDA and other Canadian partners 350,000 small businesses have been started with microfinance loans. There is a marked increase in the standard of living in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has democratic institutions. There is a democratically elected prime minister. It is my understanding that the local councils and also the parliament in Afghanistan are 25%—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, yes, there has been some work done. As I said, I was there in 2005 and I saw the difference. Unfortunately, most of that work was done in the north end of the country, in Kabul, where a lot of the development happened.

Business of Supply

I was saying that a lot of the efforts over the last couple of years have been focused on combat. I would like to see more focus on development, more on diplomacy, more on getting an organization in place and expanding on that governance that exists in Afghanistan but is mainly concentrated in the north end where Kabul is. The member is right. I was there. I saw the kids going to school. I saw the little girls going to school. I have a daughter myself. It is very important to have education. But when we look at the south, in Kandahar, it is not happening. I do not believe that combat is the way to do that.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this discussion on Canada's role in Afghanistan.

In doing so, I would like to take us back to the origin of this mission in which our Liberal government essentially undertook to commit troops, and diplomatic and development efforts to Afghanistan following September 11, 2001. At that time it was learned, and perhaps intelligence was aware of this before the fact, that there were a number of terrorist camps in Afghanistan with the blessing or the support of both of the Taliban regime. It was decided that action had to be taken.

Osama bin Laden was the key leader in that endeavour at the time and the United Nations sanctioned the action in Afghanistan through the international security assistance force in Afghanistan, which is implemented by NATO. NATO provides the combat missions and the countries of NATO are all participants, some in very major ways, like Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and others, and some in a very minor way, but all countries of NATO are involved.

We were invited by the Afghan people to come in and help them after the initial conflict to try to rebuild their country, and help them develop the democratic institutions and the infrastructures that were needed.

We need to remind ourselves that the Taliban is a regime that has a very oppressive policy with respect to women's rights. They have a very oppressive regime when it comes to crime and punishment. They have policies and techniques that most westerners find quite abhorrent.

I supported our government's decision to stay out of Iraq. I think that was a good decision on the part of Canada, but I supported our commitment to Afghanistan. The part that we need to understand is that there are various parts of Afghanistan where the danger is more extreme. We know about the Kandahar region, where the Canadian troops are, that this is a very dangerous area.

Northern and other parts of Afghanistan are not quite so dangerous. This is where the NATO troops are deployed in various levels and in various numbers, but some of the countries, like Germany and France, committed their troops to Afghanistan with various caveats. They said that they would be involved in Afghanistan militarily, but they will not fight in the south, they will not have troops in the south of Afghanistan where the dangers are greater, or they will not fight at night. There are a number of caveats which are somewhat problematic.

In 2006, when I was at meetings in Arusha in Tanzania, I met with some Afghani MPs who were there and I made a point of chatting

with them. They told me two things. First, the levels of corruption in Afghanistan were quite incredible, horrible in fact. The levels of corruption in Afghanistan had permeated all sectors of society: the military, the police, the judicial system, the private sector and pretty much everything.

Second, they also told me that in their judgment Canada was getting the short end of the stick with respect to the rotation in Kandahar because of the fact that Canada was in the south and had been in the south for a while, and there were other countries which refused to go into the south where the danger was greatest.

I certainly brought that message back and spoke about it at the time. That is something I support in terms of the rotation. That is what the motion essentially talks about, that Canada would not be in Afghanistan beyond 2009 unless there is a commitment of 1,000 extra troops and some equipment, including helicopters et cetera to assist with the mission in Kandahar. That should be, and is, the bottom line as far as Canada is concerned.

● (1645)

There has to be rotation of other NATO troops into Kandahar, into the south, to help share that load. We are hoping, on this side and I think on all sides of the House, that NATO will come through with that kind of effort.

My own personal view is that while Canada should get some relief in Kandahar and we should refocus our efforts in terms of developmental assistance, I do not see how our combat forces in Afghanistan can be involved in developmental projects without the risk of getting into some kind of combat operation.

I say that because if, for example, Canadian troops are providing some protection to a road building project in a part of Afghanistan and the Taliban decides to use some hit and run tactics on this particular project, I do not think we can expect Canadian troops to stand by while they see the Taliban scampering up the hills and phoning Kandahar to say, "Someone has to come and deal with these people".

What is coming out of this compromise which seems to be coming from the House, and I hope it does, is that the party opposite has agreed that we have to have an exit strategy in Afghanistan. We cannot be there forever.

Therefore, the Conservatives have agreed to put a finite term on our mission in Afghanistan at 2011. I think on this side of the House there is a view now that we cannot micro-manage the military leaders in the field. Does that mean that they are given carte blanche to engage in combat? No, but I think the rules of engagement have to be very clearly defined and clearly understood.

However, I am of the view that we cannot have troops in Afghanistan without giving them the latitude and the flexibility that they need to protect themselves and the people that they are trying to protect as well.

Business of Supply

In this area of southern Afghanistan the level of drug production, poppies, I am told, is equivalent to about 80% of the total poppy production and consumption in the world. Those poppies are converted into heroin and cocaine. Those drugs are causing huge amounts of destruction on our streets in Canada, around the world, and indeed in my riding of Etobicoke North. I think we have to deal with that.

What we have discovered, of course, is that when the combat troops get closer to the drug crops, the Taliban increase their efforts. They have a lot of cash. They hire more people to get involved in combat activities. Therefore, to the question that there is no military solution in Afghanistan, I think there is some validity to that argument.

By the same token, and I think the Russians are a good example of a country that found that out, when we are dealing with this type of insurgency, this type of terrorist group and given the terrain and topography of Afghanistan, I am not sure that a military solution is in the cards, depending on how we define a military solution.

I think we should be looking at another question and that is what are the consequences of leaving Afghanistan prematurely before the Afghani people have taken on the additional responsibilities for their military, their police, and to the extent that they can supplant this United Nations force? What are the consequences for the Afghani people by pulling out?

To pull out immediately would be totally irresponsible. By 2011 it gives the UN and NATO allies a chance to transfer some of those skills and some of the technologies to the Afghani people, so that they can carry on their mission.

The independent advisory panel on the Afghan mission, which was headed by our colleague on this side of the House, John Manley, the former deputy prime minister, came up in my view with a very balanced and reasoned report. I could quibble about whether a 1,000 troops is sufficient to do the job.

• (1650)

Nonetheless, I think the panel came up with a balanced report. I certainly can live with that, the qualifier being that NATO must respond with additional troops and equipment, so that our troops can get some relief because our soldiers are just as important as soldiers from other NATO countries. We need to ensure that the burden is shared fairly and evenly across all members of NATO.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a lot of what the member said makes sense. He did, however, make the statement that he does not believe there is a military solution. Our government does not believe that a military solution alone is the answer either. We believe in a balanced approach that includes: diplomacy, development and defence.

However, if the member believes there is no ultimate military solution to the problems of Afghanistan, does he support commencement of negotiations with the Taliban to move toward a power sharing arrangement with that terrorist organization?

• (1655)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how one would even define a military solution, but if we can make small advances in Afghanistan, if we can neutralize the growth of the Taliban and

incrementally reduce their influence and sphere of influence, I would see that as some measure of success.

With respect to actually negotiating with the Taliban, my own personal judgment would be that it might not be totally inappropriate to at least engage in some kind of discussions with them, but I think one would have to be very careful. That is sort of stating the obvious I guess, but there might be circumstances it seems to me where there might be a power sharing model that might be acceptable to all.

I would be very careful before putting any ink to paper on a deal with the Taliban because I am not sure that if one did disengage, based on those commitments, I am not sure how much we could put into any sort of arrangement or deal with the Taliban given their history and their agenda in that part of the world.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke a little bit about rotation. This was one of the areas in the whole debate leading up to today's motion that has come into some question. A number of opposition parties spoke about the concept of being able to rotate other countries in and other countries out.

The question came before the foreign affairs committee when retired General Lewis MacKenzie was there. He stated that he does not believe in that type of rotation. Rotation speaks of a nation rotating its own soldiers in and out of a country. The concept of rotating another country in ends up eroding a lot of the very positive work that the one country's military has done.

I did note that he spoke a little bit about other countries rotating. The general also stated that when there are new countries moving in, many times it is almost like starting at square one and for this reason we have allotted different areas to different countries.

I think Mr. Manley in his report came up with that idea as well because he stated that we must supplement what is already there, not rotate all of Canada out and put another country in.

Could the member expand on what his ideas about rotation would look like?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, one of the problems we have is that when we have non-military people speaking in military terms we can often get sidelined.

I understand the value of rotation within a combat unit, but when I talked about rotation in my parlance, I was talking about having other NATO countries share in the major combat burden in Kandahar. As I understand it, for lack of better terminology, there is a seek and destroy unit in Kandahar whose mission it is to go out and seek and destroy the Taliban.

I think the Canadian troops have been doing that quite capably, but I would like to see other NATO troops take some of that responsibility, whether it is shared or not I am not so finite on that, but I think that other NATO countries should share in that burden and Canadian troops could move out to other areas and help in that way.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak once again about Canada's mission in Afghanistan, and particularly to echo today's motion on the role of Canada in Afghanistan.

Quebeckers find this role confusing, even ambiguous. What role exactly does Canada want to play by participating in the NATO and UN mission in Afghanistan? We believe that Canada must focus more on reconstruction and military training. That has always been the position of the Bloc Québécois, who would like to see this process begin immediately and continue until the end of the mission in February 2009. The Government of Canada must present a position that clearly reflects this role. It must make a clear commitment before the NATO summit in Bucharest, which is to begin on April 2, 2008.

Let us remember that this is not the first time Parliament is debating the mission in Afghanistan and its February 2009 deadline. Allow me to elaborate on some aspects of the last speech on this issue I gave in this House.

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

Defeating the Taliban regime was relatively easy; achieving peace and rebuilding a viable Afghan state is a far more demanding task. The fundamental objective of the international coalition and the United Nations is to reconstruct the economy, the democracy and a viable Afghan state enabling Afghans to take control of their country and their development.

Canada has been on mission in the Kandahar region since October 2005. In February 2006, it assumed command from the United States of the regional command south in Kandahar. Canada was responsible for the Enduring Freedom operations conducted by the coalition in southern Afghanistan until November 2006. At that time, Canada also committed to keeping most of its troops there until February 2007. In May 2006, the Conservative government asked the House to support extending the Afghan mission by another two years, effective February 2007. The House agreed to this extension. At that point, the mission was to end in February 2009.

In July 2006, NATO officially took over command in southern Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces left Operation Enduring Freedom to join the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF.

The situation in southern Afghanistan proved to be much tougher than originally thought. NATO troops, and particularly Canadian troops, have faced organized and ferocious resistance from the Taliban. It was at that point that the number of deaths of Quebeckers and Canadians started rising at an alarming rate, going from eight deaths between 2001 and 2005 to 70 deaths between 2006 and 2008. For a country of about 30 million people, we can consider that we

have done our part. In fact, Canada has deployed the fourth-largest number of troops in Afghanistan and has suffered the third-highest number of deaths. Canada has paid a high human price to maintain security in Kandahar. The country has not lost so many lives since the Korean War.

Add to that the financial cost of the mission. According to figures published in National Defence's report on plans and priorities, the cost of Canadian operations in Afghanistan was over \$7.7 billion for the period from 2001 to 2008. If it ended the combat mission in February 2009, Canada would have some financial flexibility to invest in development assistance in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, if we consider that NATO's mission in Kandahar is an international mission and that 38 countries currently have a military presence in Afghanistan, we can say without shame that Canada has carried out an important and dangerous mission in Afghanistan for over three years, and that the time has come for others to take over in that region.

• (1700)

Even though we want Canada to withdraw from Kandahar at the end of its mission, we do not think that the entire NATO mission should end. That is why we have always advocated handing the reins over to other NATO countries to replace the Canadian contingent in Kandahar. The federal government should notify NATO member countries now that our mission will end in February 2009.

Complete withdrawal from Afghanistan, as recommended by the NDP, would be irresponsible toward the Afghan people, their government and our allies, who are counting on our participation until 2009.

We need to create a new balance by the end of the mission in 2009. That is why for some time now, the Bloc Québécois has supported focusing on increasing development and diplomacy in Afghanistan.

For too long, all we have heard the government talk about is money and military and human resources. Since 2001, the primarily political process through which sustainable peace can be achieved has often been ignored in debate.

However, the crux of the problem is this: if our deepest desire is to give Afghanistan back to the Afghan people, that is, to support our friends in distress to help them regain their autonomy and sovereignty over the land they inhabit, then our actions must reflect this basically political paradigm and must involve representatives from the Afghan government. Otherwise, the legitimacy of our actions could easily be questioned by the Afghan people. We are in Afghanistan because the Afghan people want us there. We must act as partners with the Afghan people and their representatives.

Business of Supply

However, since the very beginning of this mission that we are participating in along with 38 other countries, the coherence of our efforts has left something to be desired. This lack of coherence is one of the main reasons for the opposition expressed by people in Quebec and Canada regarding this mission. Indeed, can we blame these citizens for opposing a mission that sends their brothers and sisters to the other side of the world, when it is impossible to concretely measure the results?

We believe that Canada and the international community should give the mission in Afghanistan a “success program” that would include clear objectives combined with success indicators allowing us to measure our progress over the months and years, while recognizing that this will be a long process that will no doubt continue long after the departure of Quebec and Canadian troops.

So that we do not lose the support of the Afghan people, this political rebalancing would mean that Canada must immediately contribute to development assistance that is strategically planned and well monitored and that produces measurable results.

In that regard, all the NGOs that appeared before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in the course of our study on Afghanistan emphatically declared that the amount of money invested must not take precedence over the quality of the programs created or serve as means of measuring the results achieved. It is the results that will determine whether the money invested was worthwhile and the foundations can be laid for an Afghan state.

This is an urgent matter. In the wake of over 20 years of war, devastation reigns in Afghanistan. There is next to no civil infrastructure or economic growth. Everything needs to be reconstructed. It is therefore not surprising that Afghanistan is considered one of the poorest countries in the world.

It is becoming increasingly clear that concerted action by the international community is required for successful development in Afghanistan. To convince our allies to do more, Canada must lead by example and increase aid immediately, and we must ensure that the money invested produces compelling results as quickly as possible.

Canada can and must invest more resources in Afghanistan and must increase the budget for development assistance. This would enable us to achieve the goal of 0.7% of the GDP by 2015, as promised, and as recommended by the UN. Let us not forget that currently, Canada allocates 0.27% of its GDP to development assistance.

We have to increase that amount to provide humanitarian aid in the short term and to help with the construction of roads, wells, and basic infrastructure.

● (1705)

Furthermore, it is well known that, generally speaking, international aid and reconstruction efforts are poorly coordinated. As the Secretary General of NATO stated:

We need a better international coordination structure for Afghanistan. We must provide the security and do the reconstruction but we must also do the politics.

His comments echo those of the UN Secretary-General:

—without stronger leadership from the [Afghan] government, greater donor coherence—including improved coordination between the military and civilian international engagement in Afghanistan—and a strong commitment from neighbouring countries, many of the security, institution-building and development gains made since the Bonn Conference may yet stall or even be reversed.

In January 2007, inspired by what was done in Bosnia and Kosovo, the Bloc Québécois proposed the appointment of a senior UN official with real, considerable power to better coordinate all international aid in cooperation with the Afghan government. This senior representative would also act as the link between NATO and the reconstruction teams in order to direct aid to where it is needed most.

We were pleased to hear the Minister of Foreign Affairs say he was in favour of appointing a development assistance coordinator in his speech to the UN General Assembly on October 2, 2007.

Canada and its allies must also channel their aid as much as possible through multilateral organizations, and in particular United Nations agencies, since this will eliminate duplication and avoid working at cross purposes.

As well, the issue of poppy cultivation is key to the economic development of Afghanistan. The illegal opium trade feeds corruption in the Afghan government and is also used to finance the Taliban insurgents. The difficulty, however, lies in the fact that the poppy crop that is the source of opium is still a lucrative means of subsistence for some Afghan growers.

We must recognize that since 2002, poppy production has risen steadily. It has increased from 70,000 hectares under cultivation in 2002 to 165,000 hectares in 2006.

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

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

Canada should play a bigger role in the diplomatic realm, as well.

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

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

Business of Supply

At present, Pakistan is experiencing widespread political instability. Since the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the country has been on the brink of a civil war, with democrats, the military and religious groups engaged in a struggle for power.

Canada should use diplomacy, as far as possible, to create the conditions that are needed for stabilizing the country. If Pakistan were to descend into chaos, the impact on Afghanistan would be far-reaching.

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

And last, the Afghan government, the international community and Canada must be open to negotiations with the Taliban, again, as far as possible, in order to achieve a lasting peace.

• (1710)

Again, development assistance and putting new infrastructure in place must go hand in hand with a process of political dialogue that must include Afghans from every region. This is essentially a matter of implementing a national reconciliation process where the different cultures of the Afghan mosaic will find their place in the construction of a modern Afghanistan and where differences will be resolved democratically and not through the use of weapons.

Allow me to add this, Mr. Speaker: whether in Afghanistan or elsewhere, the Bloc Québécois has always supported the principle that Canada must treat detainees humanely and in accordance with the Geneva convention and the convention against torture. This has hardly been the case for the detainees transferred to the Afghan authorities. Having heard about major problems and the torture of detainees, we asked repeatedly for changes to the relevant agreement between Canada and the Afghan defence minister.

As a result of all the pressure exerted by the Bloc Québécois and civil society, Canada signed a second agreement with Afghanistan on the treatment of detainees on May 3, 2007. It was an improvement on the 2005 agreement, but to be effective, it must be vigorously enforced.

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

The Bloc Québécois feels as well that, in proposing to extend this mission until December 2011 instead of ending it in February 2009 as originally intended, the Harper government is completely disregarding the desires of the people of—

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please.

The member for Papineau knows that we refer to other members by their title or the name of their riding.

She has three minutes to finish her speech.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I thought you were stopping me. I obviously do not have my earpiece.

Our soldiers have done their part by fighting for several years in the most dangerous area in Afghanistan. Until the end of the mission in 2009, Canada should help the people of Afghanistan through the training of Afghan forces, reconstruction, development and diplomacy. That is the best way to promote democracy to the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her interesting speech.

[*English*]

For the most part, my colleague's speech was thoughtful. I disagree on a few points. I will say, though, that the best statement by Quebeckers in this whole thing is the statement by the Van Doos in terms of their mission accomplishment, and we should be very thankful for that.

Training and development were among the things the member talked about. We have been doing that all along. It is accelerating. The further along we get, the more capable the Afghans are. I have a question for her, but first I have a couple of points.

The member talked about providing more aid to Afghanistan. We could always do more, but we are giving over \$1 billion in aid to Afghanistan. It is our largest single recipient of foreign aid.

She talked about a lack of economic growth. In fact, the average wage for Afghans has doubled and the GDP has tripled since 2002. It started from a pretty low base, but that is growth and there is progress.

I am pleased to hear that she believes we should be there in a continuing role for development and so on, and I think she agrees that there needs to be a security umbrella over that, although we may disagree about who should provide it.

The question I have for the member relates to how she talked about Pakistan, the influence of Pakistan, and the ability of the Taliban to hide there. With regard to the recent elections in Pakistan, particularly the election in the northwest frontier province, where the Taliban-friendly party was in fact booted out of office and the ANP was voted in, which will be much less Taliban friendly, I would like her to comment on how she thinks that might influence the ability of the Taliban to operate as freely as it has been historically.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Yes, there has been a change in government in Pakistan. But in the absence of immediate results, we should not assume that things will change.

We must ensure that Canada's diplomatic position and diplomatic statements are continuous and that we are able to see the trends at any given time. That would enable us to intervene and prevent the situation from returning to what it was in the past.

Business of Supply

As we have known since the start of the war, the Taliban are extremely powerful and they are everywhere. If we leave them alone, telling ourselves that since there has been a change in government, the Taliban will change, we would be kidding ourselves, because that part of the world has been at war for a very long time. We will probably see long-term changes over the years. But we must monitor things and there must always be a diplomatic presence so that we can take action at any time.

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's speech was well thought out.

Your facts are in line with what most people are well aware of. I noted your concern about the transfer of prisoners. The events of the weekend, with the President of the United States announcing that he is going to veto an anti-torture bill that Congress and the Senate have passed, are of great concern.

However, let me take this a little further. From 1978 to 1988, the Soviet Union had from 80,000 to 250,000 troops in Afghanistan. They lost 14,000 and had 53,000 wounded. We have been there seven years. We have the former defence minister, someone we would expect to be well informed—of anybody in this country—on where we are situated in this particular war, admitting that “there is no military solution” to this.

Would that not make it obvious, or should it not be obvious to people, that now is the time to move away from this combat role immediately to protect ourselves and our countrymen who are over there serving?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before I recognize the hon. member for Papineau, I would like to give a friendly reminder to the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek not to use the second person but the third person, because the only second person is the one standing here, and I do not have all that wisdom.

The hon. member for Papineau.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that there is no military solution. This has been demonstrated by the years and decades of war in that part of the world. A military solution is not a solution. However, the solution could be military if combined with something else. The military aspect alone is not enough, which is why we called for a reorganization of Canada's efforts.

We are not alone in this. Thus, when we say we want to leave the combat zone, we have taken into account that others can take up that part of the mission so that we can focus our efforts on development and reconstruction, which, incidentally, would be more in line with what is important to Canadians, rather than always being deployed in combat zones.

We do not feel it would be appropriate for the mission to end, and we are not calling for the mission to end completely. However, with 38 countries present, we believe that it is totally unfair that Canada should remain in the most dangerous part of the country any longer. We have given our share and done our part. Let us leave this role to

others and engage in more diplomacy and development in Afghanistan.

We are not really saying that the entire mission should end, but as Canadians and as Quebeckers, we need to recognize that our efforts have earned us the right to work more in other areas where we have expertise. And that is what the public is calling on us to do. This is a key part of the Bloc Québécois position.

[English]

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the member's intervention. The Bloc Québécois from time to time claims to have a monopoly on representing women and children, but of course the member knows that it is perhaps the women and children who are at greatest risk if we abandon Afghanistan.

My question for her is this. If we as a Canadian government withdraw our armed forces from Kandahar, and the rest of the international community does that as well, how does she expect those vulnerable women and children, and those who have thrown in their lot with the international community in building a strong democracy in Afghanistan, to defend themselves against the Taliban? The Taliban will almost certainly want to return and implement their horrific regime, one that has imposed such terrible misery on the people of Afghanistan.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by telling my hon. colleague that the Bloc Québécois does not claim to have a monopoly on representing women and children. We hope that all the members of this House feel that it is their duty to protect women and children. However, men who wage war have always used women and children as an excuse for their aggressive attitudes. They always say they are going to protect women and children, yet all over the world we see that women and children are always at the bottom of the heap. And that makes no sense.

However, we understand that men use women and children in this way in order to ease their conscience. Things being what they are, this is something we must keep in mind. We are saying that we must pull out, because there are other people who share the responsibility for looking after the weakest members of society. We should let them do their part.

Nowhere does it say that Canadians are the only ones who can defend the people of Afghanistan or other countries. It makes no sense that we should be the only ones who realize this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi for a brief question.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate my colleague from Papineau.

Given that we have spent \$4.7 billion on the war over two years, could we not also spend \$4.7 billion on reconstruction and be just as popular, rather than shooting Afghans as we are now doing?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Papineau for a brief answer.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, it is obviously a matter of balance. If all the money is used for the military mission because we tell ourselves that there has to be security and we do nothing else, the same people we are supposed to be helping, and who are also being killed—we should not forget that—will turn against us and tell us to go home. Therefore, we must rebalance the mission so that we invest at least 0.7% of our GDP—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Yukon.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Charlottetown. He always has good points to make and I appreciate him as a colleague in Parliament.

First of all, I want to thank all the parties for the fine balance they have struck in this debate. All members of Parliament strongly support our troops and the work they do, but also the importance of having a public debate without giving our enemies an advantage or disadvantaging our allies. It is the public's right to know, the public's right to see a debate of ideas on something that is very important to them. I congratulate all the parties for dealing with a very difficult debate in a very sensitive manner.

I visited our troops in Afghanistan to make sure they had everything they need. I am very supportive of the excellent work they are doing. Having been there, I can attest to the great support and appreciation that the Afghan people I met have for us and for our efforts there.

In my riding a couple of Yukoners left for Afghanistan recently. I visited their families or wrote to them. They are very proud of their sons, as they should be, although they are worried about their sons being in harm's way. They feel it is something of value to help people, and they are very proud of that.

Having being over there, I am very proud of the aid the allies are providing, schools and other type of aid to very poor people. Canada is offering an instrumental service there and around the world. Canada is well known for doing very important work for people who have less than we have.

Let us imagine for a minute that a family is on a hike on a Sunday in November. It is getting dark. It is cold and some snow flurries start to fall. The family is lost. They find a rundown wood shack with nothing in it, except for a bag of rice or dried beans and not much else. Darkness falls and the family has to spend the night in the shack. They did not tell people when they would be back so no one will be looking for them for quite some time. Think of the awful prospects of that family, the young children and the wife and husband with no heat, no matches and no sustenance. What an awful situation.

Many people in Afghanistan face that type of life, not just for two days, but for their entire lives. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. When it gets cold and it snows, people are scrounging around for some type of heat, a wood fire on the dirt floor, but outside there is no wood. It is either desert or above the treeline. People have to scrounge for the very little fuel there is. Compared to what we have,

as we could see when we were there, it really is a horrible life. Many people there are thinking more about survival than about politics.

So, for that family that is lost on their hike, imagine if a couple of men with guns burst open the door of the shack. The kids, the wife and the husband are there and the men threaten them, telling them that the wife cannot leave the shack alone and the kids cannot go to school. Would the family agree? I think they would pretty well promise anything in a situation like that because it is not their biggest concern.

● (1730)

These poor people were overrun by Taliban with submachine guns and other weapons telling them what to do and they were not going to get that politically involved. How could they have any say at all or control? They were subjected to a totalitarian, religious, ideological government dictating over people's rights and freedoms.

That could have gone on for a long time, but the Taliban made a mistake. They attacked the United States, North America and many people in the western world. When they attacked the World Trade Center, it was not simply a United States building. Canadians and representatives from countries around the world died. No one wants to be attacked, so the people of the free world fought back. Perhaps we in the western world should be ashamed that we did not lobby against that regime harder and earlier.

The former bureau chief in Kabul, a journalist and the wife of the Afghan Ambassador to Canada explained that under the Taliban, women were not allowed to work. They were not allowed to attend school or pursue an education. They were not allowed to receive medical care from a male doctor. They basically were non-citizens without rights or representation, which is totally foreign to Canadian values. No wonder NATO and the UN were supportive of this mission.

As many members have said, a lot of things have to come into play to solve the problem. It is not just arms. We have to provide a living for these people and it costs a lot of money. I will get into that later.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi said that the solution is not violence or war. Competing interests will assume that the side with the most arms is the one that will solve the problem. That is not the permanent solution we are looking for.

I have a lot more to say, but I will save it for the next time I speak to the issue.

Regarding rotation, when Canadian geese fly north, the lead position of the flight in the V is very strenuous and taxing, so the members of the flock take turns in the position up front for the common good. They take a battering up front. Canada has taken that position long enough. It is our turn to move back in the flock to recover. That is the theory and the philosophy of NATO, which of course we support. Many members of the House have spoken in favour of that rotation.

Finally, I want to put on the record the questions that we have asked of the government and we are still waiting for answers to finalize the details of what we are looking for.

Business of Supply

When exactly will the government notify NATO of the end date in 2011? Why did it change that date from February to July 2011? Why has it chosen 1,000 as the exact number of additional troops? Could we have the analysis behind that? What is the timeframe for meeting the conditions with respect to new troops and equipment? When will we be able to say that the conditions have not been met? On the detainees, what is Canada doing to ensure that we are in compliance with our international obligations?

I hope that with everyone working in cooperation to find a solution that we can finalize the details of the solution for the people of Afghanistan. Teachers who tried to teach girls were murdered. People had no vote and no personal freedoms because they had to follow a religious ideology with which they may not have agreed. People are very poor but they have a marvellous nation and could be free and move forward like other people in the world who have much better lives.

• (1735)

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest, as I have done with every debate we have had thus far on this important subject. It is my belief that this is probably the most important subject that we can debate in our nation's Parliament at this particular time in our history. It is the debate that will ultimately decide whether we continue to have our young people in uniform in harm's way.

I listened with some great interest to my colleague from Yukon and his suggestion that we try to imagine the lifestyle of the average Afghani. I speak probably for everyone in this chamber and for all Canadians when I say that our hearts go out to these people. We know how poor they are. We know the trials and tribulations they face on a daily basis just to have some food, some heat, as my colleague was suggesting, in their homes, if they are fortunate enough to have a home of any type at all.

I would ask the member to imagine one situation that I was just made aware of. Six Afghan female members of parliament visited our country just last week. The Speaker of our august chamber had the opportunity to introduce them to the House and, through the television cameras, to our nation.

One of these individuals told me that she had not always been a member of parliament. As the member said, in the past under the Taliban regime women were not allowed to work at all, let alone to aspire to and ultimately become an elected member of parliament. Yet that is the role she has now. She told me that unfortunately her husband had been arrested by the Taliban, had been tortured, and had been murdered by that regime. I would ask my colleague to imagine that.

Imagine what it must be like for that individual to come to a nation like Canada to express her appreciation for everything that Canada has done, for the sacrifices that so many of our young Canadians have made, and then hear the leader of an opposition party suggest that we negotiate with these people, the people who took her husband, the people who left her a widow. She is the mother of two young girls. I would ask my colleague to imagine that.

I wonder if my colleague could suggest to me how it could be possible to negotiate power sharing, which the New Democratic

Party believes is somehow possible, with the Taliban when, as he pointed out, ideologically they are so different in so many ways from the duly elected Afghan government that is in power today.

• (1740)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his thoughtful remarks. The awful conditions over there and the total lack of democracy are exactly why we need a solution. We need to start working toward that solution.

The Canadian people appreciate that we have set a deadline for the rotation so that other countries can play a role over there. We could then provide the necessary aid as well as other things to convince the Afghan people to come onside and permanently support that democracy when the troops are not there.

I am sure all members of Parliament know that the hearts of the people have to be on our side. They have to be convinced that what we are doing is in their best interests. They have to be convinced that what we are doing will give them better lives. We cannot subjugate them totally by military force.

That is why we want to move on and put some major investments into the country. We have made good investments so far, but we need to put some major investments into building people's lives, into helping protect those who are building people's lives, and into training the Afghan military and police so Afghans can be in charge of their own lives. When people have control over their own lives in a free environment is when democracy works.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this very important issue. When I look at the documents that support this motion and some of the debates that we have heard today, what I think the Canadian public looks for is clarity. Not only the Canadian public are looking for clarity on Afghanistan, but also our troops in Afghanistan and our international allies are looking for it as well.

Sometimes this is boiled down into simplistic statements, which I do not think are that constructive. We are now in Kandahar province in a very specific role. It will change somewhat in 2009, and end totally in 2011. I hope Canada's role in Afghanistan will not end in 2011. In the whole area of diplomacy, development and foreign aid, et cetera, there will be an ongoing role for Canada.

The issue we are dealing with will not end in 2011, 2013, 2015 or 2017. It will go on. We are dealing with a failed country. It did not fail last year or the year before. It failed generations ago. I think our country and perhaps more important our allies deserve some of the fault. Afghanistan was of interest to our allies when the Russians were there during the Cold War. That interest disappeared from the radar screen after the Russians withdrew their troops, I believe in 1989.

Between 1989 and 2001, very little effort was put into Afghanistan. We have seen what happened. The terrible conditions that existed there were well debated and well expressed in the House before Canada entered.

Business of Supply

I want to make the important point that as far as I am concerned this will be a litmus test as to the future of the NATO organization. This is not a Canadian mission. This is not a United States mission. This is not a Great Britain mission. It is a NATO mission. There are 37 countries in NATO. Right now 2,500 Canadian troops and approximately between 37,000 and 40,000 troops are in Afghanistan.

We were a party to the Afghanistan compact, signed I believe in January 2006, which had benchmarks and time lines. Again, if we read the Manley report, one of the glaring statements in that report is the lack of leadership from NATO in this initiative.

Responsibility shared is responsibility shirked. That has to be a very important component of this debate and of debate in the NATO meetings coming up as to the role of NATO in Afghanistan. Also, Canadians want to know what are the time lines, the benchmarks and the game plan.

Again, the motion calls for a continuation after 2009 to 2011. It would refocus on training the Afghan National Security Forces for reconstruction and development and the continuing Canadian responsibility for the Kandahar provincial reconstruction initiative.

It has been said by many speakers before me that in the long run there is no military solution to Afghanistan. The solution has to come from the Afghan people, but it is the developed world that has to provide the assistance to provide the basics such as the infrastructure, the government and the economy for the country to develop as it should develop.

We have heard about the economy of Afghanistan. I understand from everything I have read that Afghanistan provides 90% of the world's heroin and that crop increased 34% last year, which in and of itself is very disturbing.

• (1745)

I fully support the notion that our engagement in the Kandahar end in 2011 to allow for a natural rotation of another country, not more Canadian troops. Again, that comes back to NATO. If NATO thinks we will be there forever, there will be absolutely nothing done. There will be no leadership shown by that organization.

Another issue that was raised strikingly in the Manley report was the whole issue of communications on this initiative or the lack thereof to the Canadian people. I hope, going forward, that some of the recommendations in the motion, which are supported by the Manley report, are adopted. I would like to see a parliamentary committee. I would like to see a lot more leadership conveyed to the Canadian people with clarity as to exactly what goes on in that country, what the benchmarks are and how we plan to accomplish what we set out to accomplish.

I hope the debate will lead to a lot more clarity on our role in Afghanistan. More important, and I know I am repetitive, the international debate vis-à-vis the role of NATO, the future of NATO and the leadership of NATO on this issue, has to be very distinctly set out, not only to Canadians but to all members of NATO.

As one of the previous speakers pointed out, there have been some other political developments going on in Pakistan that may assist in this whole initiative. However, a new coalition government was

announced over the weekend. We do not know yet, and this is speculation on my part and anyone else's part, but that may assist in the resolution of this issue in the long run. Again, it is too early to tell.

The other issue is the outcome of the United States election, which may have a profound effect on the United States engagement in Afghanistan, depending on who wins the election. As the House knows, again, this is speculation at this point in time.

I hope we end this debate with our role being clarified, the language of our engagement being clarified and that the language being concise.

• (1750)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague with interest. No one has ever said that a military only solution is possible in Afghanistan. Will my colleague agree with me that the military is a critical component of a solution when we deal with a murderous regime like the Taliban?

He made a comment wherein he said that responsibility shared was responsibility shirked. I would think that responsibility should be shared by Canada and other NATO allies. Therefore, I am unsure what he meant by that. Could he clarify that?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, on the first point, I do not necessarily call it a military solution, but there has to be security and that is provided by the military. There has to be security while NATO continues to develop in Afghanistan. That is obvious from what is going on.

On the NATO issue, from everything I have read on this issue and everything I have heard in the House and in other fora, there has to be leadership in that organization. That leadership cannot come from 37 different countries. I do not see it right now. John Manley and the other distinguished people on his panel did not see it either. They were quite critical of the leadership coming from that organization.

This is a NATO initiative. If we do not have leadership coming from that organization with respect to this initiative, the initiative is going to fail.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know time is very short, so I will keep this short. I posed a question for his colleague, the member for Yukon, and I had hoped to get a response.

There are some in this place and outside of this place who suggest negotiations should be undertaken with the Taliban to eventually lead to power sharing in Afghanistan, recognizing what I would think are irreconcilable differences between the way in which the Taliban regime operated when it was in power and where presumably it would operate again.

I think about the views of the Taliban on the separation of mosque and state and on the lack of rights of women as two primary areas that dramatically differentiate them from the free and democratic government currently in place in Afghanistan. How would it be possible to share power with an organization, a political party, a regime that adheres to those types of ideological extremism? Does my colleague support the idea of negotiating power sharing with a regime like that?

Business of Supply

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I am going to answer with my impressions only.

Again, this is a very complex issue. Sometimes the difficulty is when we try to boil it down into very simplistic statements. Right now I would agree with the member that I would not want to see negotiations take place with the Taliban. Perhaps in five or ten years time it might not be ruled out.

However, I would ask the House to look at what happened in northern Ireland. That went on for generations and generations, killing after killing. Both sides were very set in their opinions. There was not a military or a violent solution to the problems in northern Ireland. The solution came when the parties got together and there was a negotiation between people. The thought of those two people speaking to each other, being in the same room, or even being in the same city was unheard of twenty years ago.

Right now, with the actions of the Taliban, I agree with the member's premise. However, in eight years or ten years, or in two year or five years, I do not know.

• (1755)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to participate in this important debate on Canada's future role in Afghanistan.

I will be sharing my time with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Members of the House have now had several weeks to carefully consider the government's revised motion on the extension of our military mission in Kandahar. It is important for us to ponder this matter with the utmost consideration.

As parliamentarians, we have a tremendous responsibility. The decision we collectively make will have a profound impact on the millions of Afghans who are looking to us and our international partners for assistance. It will also have a profound impact on the cohesion of the NATO alliance, on global and regional security, and on the brave Canadian men and women, civilian and military, who are helping Afghans rebuild their country after decades of conflict.

Our government fully understands what is at stake. We have been proud and consistent supporters of the Afghanistan mission since 2001. We believe that NATO's International Security Assistance Force mission, of which Canada is a part alongside 39 other nations, is not only fully justified but also firmly rooted in the traditions of Canadian foreign policy.

Because this is such a critical issue not only for Canadians but for Afghans and for our international partners as well, it is not only understandable but also desirable that we as parliamentarians carefully examine every option that is before us. It is our duty as elected officials.

Like all members present, I take this responsibility very seriously, but it is a burden that we carry with pride and resolve. Parliamentarians demonstrated that resolve in 2006 when the House of Commons voted for a two year extension of the mission.

As the end of that mandate approaches, there obviously has been a vigorous debate over what happens next. Our government welcomes this debate, but given what is at stake both for our troops and the Afghan people, we also want the debate to be as non-partisan as possible.

That is why last October the Prime Minister appointed a group of eminent Canadians to examine options for the mission past February 2009. As we all know, the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan presented the government with its findings and recommendations in late January. To its enormous credit, it delivered a clear, fair and balanced assessment of the situation.

Through their work, Mr. Manley and his colleagues affirmed the strong belief that Canada's commitment in Afghanistan matters. Mr. Manley will be appearing tomorrow in front of the foreign affairs committee, which will be televised, and we are looking forward to his testimony.

We should all be grateful for the important work of the Manley panel. Its thoughtful analysis and recommendations have laid the foundations for a broad consensus on the future of this mission.

Our government subsequently tabled a motion reflecting the panel's recommendations, including its direction that we engage our NATO partners to secure future troop commitments in southern Afghanistan and specifically a battle group of approximately 1,000 soldiers in Kandahar. We have since revised this motion to reflect amendments proposed by our colleagues in the official opposition. The revised government motion was introduced on February 21.

By now, I am sure, everyone is familiar with the content of this motion. It acknowledges what is required for Canada's mission to succeed in Afghanistan. It reiterates our commitment to the UN mandate for Afghanistan, but reaffirms that our commitment is not open ended. It commits our government to notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in Kandahar as of July 2011, completing redeployment from the south by December of that year.

This motion shows that parliamentarians understand the importance of building consensus on this critical issue. Finally, it clearly indicates our determination to see our commitments through.

Our government has been taking vigorous steps to ensure that our troops have the support and equipment they need to successfully complete their mission. In recent weeks, the Prime Minister has contacted the leaders of major NATO countries and has advised them that Canada's continued role in the region is contingent on greater support from our allies.

This message was conveyed by our hon. colleague, the Minister of National Defence, when he attended the NATO defence ministers meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania in early February, and was reinforced again by our hon. colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the NATO foreign ministers meeting in Brussels last week.

• (1800)

We feel it is important that our allies know where we stand and what is at stake. We are confident that our message has been heard loud and clear.

Business of Supply

These diplomatic efforts are fully consistent with the purpose of the motion that is now before the House. It reinforces Canada's efforts toward training the Afghan national security forces so they can take increasing responsibility for security in Kandahar and Afghanistan as a whole.

Our troops must also provide security for reconstruction and development efforts in Kandahar to build on the important work Canadians have accomplished in the past few years.

Canada understands that development and security go hand in hand. Without security, there can be no humanitarian aid, no reconstruction and no democratic development.

While serious challenges remain, our efforts are bearing fruit. They are bearing fruit because our ultimate aim is to empower the Afghans to take responsibility for their own security, governance and development efforts.

We know that the only real solution is to help Afghans to take ownership of their own government.

Afghans are proud people. They appreciate our help, but they are eager to take the reins of their own destiny. By supporting Afghan efforts to establish better governance and security across the country, we are helping Afghans build the foundation for a better future.

Allow me to cite one example of an important area where Canadians are making a difference in this regard: the police training.

Canada has adopted a comprehensive approach to Afghan police reform, which includes: supporting the ministry of interior reform; providing strategic policy advice; providing equipment and uniforms; building police infrastructure; contributing to the payment of police salaries; and, deploying Canadian civilian police to train and mentor the Afghan national police.

There are currently over 46 Canadian civilians and military police trainers deployed in Afghanistan. Thanks to their efforts, over 600 members of the Afghan national police have received training through the Kandahar provincial reconstruction team, or PRT.

These are some of the efforts we have deployed to help development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.

We know that this approach is essential to the success and sustainability of our efforts. That is why our government has committed an additional \$100 million for Afghan reconstruction and development in budget 2008, bringing Canada's 2008-09 assistance envelope for Afghanistan to a projected \$280 million.

These additional resources will help the Afghan people, including through the provision of more training to the Afghan national police and the Afghan national army to allow them to take increasing responsibility for security in Kandahar and throughout the country.

These additional funds are above and beyond the commitment to double international assistance by 2010-11, which will increase Canada's total aid commitment to Afghanistan to \$1.3 billion over 10 years.

Our government is taking the steps that are necessary for this mission to be successful. We are deploying sustained efforts to

secure additional troops and further equipment capabilities from our NATO allies.

We know that Afghans are behind these goals. The international community is behind these goals. So are Canadians.

To us, the choice could not be clearer and the cause could not be more just. That is why I respectfully urge all members to support the motion that is currently before this House.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. parliamentary secretary, who touched on a few things in his statement.

Before I ask my question, I will note that as the parliamentary secretary opened his statement, to which I listened to very carefully, at one point he said "critical" but was just this short of saying "crooked", because it is really one of the problems that we are facing there.

In order to deal with the problem, we have to deal with the reality of a crooked administration. I am referring not to President Karzai but to anything beneath that level. Does the member have any suggestions for how we could address the crookedness, if I may use that word again, that is going on in that country?

Second, he touched upon what is so vital and that is the training. He talked about 46 people. I do not know if he knows, but the information I got as the former chair of the committee is that we have only about seven or eight policemen who train, and the rest might be trainers for other services, which I believe are important. Could he confirm that? If so, does he think that seven or eight policemen are adequate to do the work that vitally needs to be done?

Last, does he feel that the additional 1,000 soldiers that we are hoping to get there over the next two years are going to be sufficient to do the work that needs to be done?

• (1805)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's questions. Talking about a crooked administration, his colleague who just spoke talked about a failed state. It was a failed state for years and years. It takes time to build an administration. It takes money and effort to build an administration. That is what the international community is doing.

I can assure members that over a period of time this international effort will help eliminate the corruption and everything he was talking about, and it will build Afghanistan's independent democratic institutions, which will serve that country well.

Business of Supply

As for his other question in reference to the 46 personnel that I talked about, they are Canadian civilian and military police trainers. We have to understand that this is a comprehensive approach and it is best left to the people in the field, not the politicians in this room, to make the decisions. That is critically important. We just provide the general guidelines of what we need. It is the people on the ground who have the expertise and the knowledge to do the job effectively. Should those people ask for more officers, then Canada will look at it, but we will leave the running of it and the training to the people on the ground.

As for the reference to the 1,000 soldiers, Mr. Manley will be in front of the foreign affairs committee. My colleague can ask him the question as to why he asked for 1,000 people. However, again I will say that Mr. Manley must have heard it from the people on the ground, from our commanders, because at the end of the day it is our commanders out there who are at risk and who are commanding the forces. It is their responsibility to look after the well-being and interests of the soldiers out there and to provide the command. They are doing that. We should allow them to do their work effectively.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I asked three questions and really did not get an answer. I asked the parliamentary secretary, and I will ask again, if he feels that 46 people, of which 7 or 8 are police officers, are sufficient to do the training?

With respect to the 1,000, he talked about the Manley report and how the generals know, but here is what all the generals said, and I can name them, General Henault, General MacKenzie and General Manson. I am not saying this. The paper is saying it, if I may quote: "generals doubt 1,000 troops will turn the tide".

Could the member please respond, if he can?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Of course the hon. member for Scarborough Centre, with all his experience in the House, knows not to use props.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has 23 seconds to respond.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I answered his question. He should listen very carefully to what I am saying. All I am saying is that for military officers, for the commanders, for everybody, it is they who are on the ground who will make the decision on what is best, what the objective is and how to achieve the objective that we have laid out there. The decision should be theirs, not ours.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to add my voice to this debate.

In supporting this motion, we are fulfilling our commitment to the people of Afghanistan and the international community. We cannot walk away now. Our nation has a long and honourable tradition of contributing to international peace and security. It is a heritage that was born in the fields of Flanders, the hedgerows of northwest Europe and the hills of Korea, a heritage of Canadians serving for the greater good.

Canadians then and now take pride in the role their country plays on the world stage, and as Canadians we can take pride in our mission in Afghanistan.

• (1810)

[Translation]

Canadians have never shied away from their international responsibilities. During the first and second world wars, Canada responded to the call from its allies. Canadians fought and died to liberate others from tyranny and oppression. We have served in every region of the world on land, at sea and in the air.

From the ashes of the second world war, Canada helped found the United Nations. Our membership symbolized our commitment to international peace and security. This devotion was further demonstrated in the assistance we provided to establish the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. That alliance was designed to protect the freedom of its peoples and defend the principles of democracy, freedom and international law.

We have continued to uphold those values for almost 60 years now.

[English]

In the farthest reaches of the world, Canadians have served in multilateral missions to ensure international peace and security. From the rugged slopes of Kashmir to the heat and humidity of Haiti and almost every imaginable place in between, we have never shied away from our commitments. We recognize that this has always been dangerous and difficult work.

In Korea, over 25,000 Canadians fought oppression. This United Nations mission demonstrated the effectiveness of multinational forces. In the Balkans, the Canadian Forces proved themselves in dangerous operations to help restore stability. In Cyprus, Canadians have served for over 50 years. Our efforts have been integral to maintaining a sometimes fragile peace.

In those and countless other cases, Canada's commitment to international peace and security has been shown over and over again. I would remind members of the House and Canadians that everything that every member of the Canadian Forces does every day is about peace, and we are seeing it today in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

The report by the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan was recently released for the benefit of all Canadians. In that report, Mr. Manley and his colleagues recommend a commitment that serves Canadian interests, gives expression to Canadian values, and corresponds to Canada's capacity. These are valid goals, but goals that can only be reached if we have the courage to stay the course.

That is why I am calling on my colleagues, in this House, to join me in supporting this motion.

[English]

Our government does not believe that Canada should abandon the people of Afghanistan in 2009. As part of our international responsibilities, we have committed to helping the Afghan people. These are a people who have never enjoyed the privileges that most of us take for granted. They have a long and turbulent history. They have suffered through hostile occupations, civil war and oppression.

Business of Supply

Afghans deserve better. They deserve a chance for peace. They deserve an opportunity to rebuild their lives. They deserve a voice in their own future. We must ensure that Afghans can guarantee their own security and we cannot walk away now.

[*Translation*]

Canada is helping Afghans rebuild their country as a stable, democratic and self-sufficient society. We are there at the request of the democratically elected government, as part of a NATO-led mission under a UN mandate.

Canada's efforts in Afghanistan are based on three pillars: security, development and governance. Our soldiers provide the necessary security to facilitate development. Without security, there cannot be humanitarian aid, there cannot be reconstruction and there cannot be democratic development.

Our troops are joined by police officers, diplomats and Canadian humanitarian workers, in the help they provide to Afghans in rebuilding their lives.

We are making a difference.

[*English*]

And we are not alone. We are joined by our allies and our partners in this effort. The United Nations, NATO and the international community share our vision for a better Afghanistan. They believe as we do, that Afghans deserve a hand up and a chance at a better life.

Our allies are helping Afghans shoulder the burden of reconstruction. We are joined by 39 other nations in contributing troops to improve Afghan security. In the south alone, we have benefited from close partnerships and cooperation from Great Britain, the United States, Denmark, the Netherlands, Australia, Romania and Estonia. Together with our allies and partners, we have almost 19,000 troops in the south of Afghanistan and others are joining us.

Recently, Poland pledged 400 more troops and 8 additional helicopters to our collective mission. We are in talks with our allies and partners to get more troops on the ground in Kandahar.

Across Afghanistan, a large and rugged country, the international community is pulling together to support the mission.

The Germans are working with the Swedes, Hungarians and Norwegians. The Italians are working with the Spaniards, Lithuanians and Turks. Afghan national security forces are taking the first courageous steps to provide for their own country's defence.

These nations and more are standing shoulder to shoulder to benefit Afghans and their country. This cooperation is a testament to what is possible with collective strength and collective resolve.

We owe it to ourselves and our allies to further this combined effort.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

In supporting the Afghanistan Compact, Canada promised to finish the process undertaken in Afghanistan.

We are going to accelerate training of the Afghan police and army, continue to help rebuild crucial infrastructure and help implement the necessary conditions to allow Afghanistan to stand on its own.

So far, that has not been an easy task.

[*English*]

We have often encountered challenges in our international missions. We do ourselves a disservice if we imagine that our duty in places like Cambodia, East Timor or the Congo has ever been easy. Tragically, in many instances the price to Canada has been steep. The Books of Remembrance inside this edifice bear testimony to that fact.

Yet, we did not walk away. We maintained our efforts, even in the face of the greatest adversity. We must do the same in Afghanistan today and we cannot stop now. We will continue to play a role on the world stage and we will continue to believe in the shared values of democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law. These are the same beliefs that led us to join the United Nations and NATO so many years ago.

Last week, as other members were, I was honoured to meet and spend time with six female members of parliament from Afghanistan. Their stories were inspirational. They left me feeling somewhat inadequate. One has a price on her head. One woman's husband was arrested, tortured and murdered by the Taliban. One has a double who stays at home to look after her family while she sneaks into parliament to do her job. All have the courage to try to make a difference in the future of their country. Our hardships certainly pale by comparison.

Their message to Canada was simple, "We have come so far, please, please don't desert us now".

Our mission in Afghanistan continues a proud Canadian tradition of international engagement. Since Canada took its first steps on the world stage, we have played a valuable role in furthering international peace and security.

As a founding member of both the United Nations and NATO, we have worked with the international community to help ensure peace and stability. Canadians take pride in this history. In Afghanistan we continue our work with the United Nations and NATO but this work is not yet done. We owe it to Afghans, our allies and ourselves to support this motion to see this mission through.

I will finish with a quote from UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, who said:

The Afghan government has far to go before it regains control of its own destiny. But that day will come. It is hard work. There is little glory. It requires sacrifices. And that is why we are there.

I urge all members to support the motion. We cannot leave until the job is done.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very moved on some of the points that the parliamentary secretary made in terms of our military, in terms of past conflicts and so on.

Business of Supply

I was quite pleased when he talked about our pride in our military. There is no question that every member in the House, and I am sure I speak for every Canadian, that our pride was, is and will continue to be there. He also touched upon some conflicts but the two conflicts that stood out were the Korean War and World War II.

I know the hon. member's previous career was in the military. I, too, come from a family whose ancestors served in those two conflicts, the Korean War and World War II. Could the member please take a moment to describe those two conflicts, describe how the world came together to address those conflicts and compare it to today's conflict?

When I have my opportunity later on to speak I will elaborate. However, it is incumbent upon us to bring forward what we are hearing on the street from our constituents. No one has ever said that we want to walk away from this.

I agree with the member that we have an obligation but could he take a moment to compare those two conflicts, the Korean War and World War II, with the current conflict and perhaps point out some of the differences?

• (1820)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague with whom I sit on the defence committee.

Korea and World War II were quite different conflicts from what is going on in Afghanistan. The similarity between all three is the fact that people were having their freedoms and their human rights taken away from them. Canada, along with allies from around the world, stepped in to end the tyranny of the Nazis in World War II. We stepped in to end the occupation of South Korea by the communist North Koreans. We are working together with 39 allies in Afghanistan to do the same thing.

Obviously the conflicts were and are all relatively different in size but the principle remains the same: it is to free people. It is people with the capacity and responsibility to stand up to tyranny and oppression to get together and to free a people who deserve to be free.

If we had not done what we did in World War II, who knows where we would be today. If we had not done what we did in Korea, South Korea would be a communist country instead of one of the most prosperous economies in the world.

There are similarities and differences between all three missions but it comes down to one simple thing: free people with the capacity to act and the national will to do the right thing in cooperation with like-minded allies who value freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Canada will always do that because it is the right thing to do.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the words of my colleague who speaks with some authority because he has been there a couple of times.

I have often thought what it would be like if we could take every Canadian over to Afghanistan, as I and many of my colleagues have been there, so they could actually see what is on the ground and see how much of a difference our young men and women are making

every day in improving the lives of Afghans and protecting them from tyranny, oppression, torture and murder.

My colleague's comments about the six young, brave Afghan female MPs certainly struck a chord with me. I wonder if he has any other personal human stories that touch people so deeply to share, not only with members of Parliament in the House but, through the wonders of the television camera, with Canadians at large.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I will focus on a couple of things.

I have spent a lot of time with our soldiers, sailors and airmen. I have spent a lot of time with our soldiers, particularly in the last couple of years, obviously because of Afghanistan, and I have talked to literally hundreds of them. I have shaken their hands as they have come back from their missions over there, have looked them in the eye and have thanked them. I have also talked to their families.

The soldiers get it. They understand why they are there because they see the differences they are making on the ground every day. Sometimes they are small differences but they are making a difference every day.

I have talked to families who have lost loved ones in Afghanistan and they get it. There is no question that they are grieving but they are very proud of what their sons and daughters did and they understand how important it was. They are solidly behind the mission.

Those are the kinds of people who I wish more Canadians could see. They are the most spectacular citizens that this country has and we would be lost without them. God bless every one of them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. I will recognize the hon. member for Scarborough Centre with the proviso that this debate will collapse at 6:30 p.m.. The hon. member has a little over five minutes.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep my comments within five minutes.

We debate this most important issue in order to deal with it. I had the opportunity some time ago to talk about the Afghan mission. I will begin today in the same fashion I did then. When we debate the mission, this theatre our men and women are engaged in today, we do it for their benefit and for the benefit of each and every Canadian.

It is not, as the parliamentary secretary pointed out earlier, a partisan issue. However, it is a partisan issue when it comes to Canada being taken for a fool. It is a partisan issue when Canadian lives are almost the only lives being put in danger. It is a partisan issue when Canadians are asked to do much more than the troops from those other 38 or 39 countries there. It is a partisan issue when NATO is not doing its share.

I said it before and I will say it again, NATO's credibility is on the line today. I have had the honour and the privilege of attending some of the NATO meetings. I have had the honour of chairing and now vice-chairing the defence committee.

Business of Supply

I do not have a military background, but over the many years I have heard from all the experts and I use their input to speak somewhat intelligently, if I may, not like the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence who proudly served in the military, and I compliment him.

He knows, as I do and all the members who sit on the committee, that there are very rare moments when we do clash. He will assure you, as I do, Mr. Speaker, that 90%, if not 99% of the time, we find ways to do what needs to be done, and that is to do the right thing.

There are two right things to do. First, is our international obligation, so that the proud tradition the hon. member spoke about is sustained and improved. Second, and just as important, is to do the right thing for the men and women whom we have asked to put their lives on the line every day while serving in Kandahar, or wherever else, as he mentioned earlier.

Do I have a beef with NATO? I hesitate to say I do, and I will give some examples. We met with the German defence committee. Every time we meet with our counterparts, whether it is at NATO conferences or not, we talk about those so-called caveats.

Earlier on I asked the parliamentary secretary to compare the two conflicts of the many that he mentioned: the Korean conflict and World War II. He said that all the Allies came together to take on the Axis forces and fight tyranny, so that today we can live in freedom. He was right.

What was the difference? When all those nations came together, they did not say that this nation will go there and that nation will go here. We went in there together. When we sent our men and women to fight in World War I and World War II, we did not have them pick their spots. They went in there full blast and did their duty.

That is why today the pride is so high and we fly our flag so proudly. That is why in Holland and all over Europe they talk about what Canadians did and their participation.

In order to deal with this problem, we have to face reality. I do not want to sound pessimistic, but I want to be realistic. The situation there is as such. Opium is extracted from the poppies that are grown there, bringing in hundreds of millions of dollars every year. Why can the international community not come together and say, "That's where the cancer is. Let us address it".

At the same time, I do agree with the comments that were made earlier to provide training for police and civil servants and build schools. That is what we do well. NATO today has to pull up its socks. I will be greatly disappointed, on behalf of my constituents and many Canadians I talk to, if we do not get the caveats lifted.

In closing, I do not like Canada being taken for a ride. That is exactly what is happening today. The French said they would send troops. Where are the French today? They are nowhere to be found. Where are all these other nations? Let us ask ourselves, where are they serving? Not too long ago, we had another Canadian soldier unfortunately pass away.

● (1825)

We have taken our hits. We are prepared to take our hits. We are asked to bring in equipment. At the same time, why can NATO not bring in the dollars and the equipment? We are providing the bodies.

But no, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs talked about it costing us \$1.8 billion over 10 years. The statistics that have come back from military people talk about over half a trillion dollars.

This is not what I am saying. I did not use a prop. I simply wanted to be accurate in my quotes. I quoted three distinguished and well-known generals. I will mention them again: Lewis MacKenzie, Paul Manson and Ray Henault. They all said that 1,000 troops will not do it. Why? It is because the Americans have confirmed this and said that we need over 400,000 troops.

● (1830)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 6:30 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that proceedings on the motion have expired.

[English]

OPPOSITION MOTION—CLIMATE CHANGE

The House resumed from March 7 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Toronto—Danforth relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

● (1855)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 62)

YEAS

Members

André
Asselin
Bachand
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bevington
Black
Blais
Bouchard
Brunelle
Carrier
Chow
Comartin
Crowder
Davies
Demers
Dewar
Duceppe
Gagnon
Godfrey
Goodale
Guimond
Jennings
Laforest
Lavallée
Lemay

Angus
Atamanenko
Barbot
Bellavance
Bigras
Blaikie
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Cardin
Charlton
Christopherson
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Dion
Faille
Gaudet
Godin
Guay
Ignatieff
Julian
Laframboise
Layton
Lessard

Government Orders

Lévesque	Lussier
Malo	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
McDonough	McGuinty
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mulcair	Nadeau
Nash	Ouellet
Paquette	Perron
Plamondon	Priddy
Proulx	Regan
Rodriguez	Roy
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Siksay	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	Stoffer
Thi Lac	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Vincent	Wasylycia-Leis— 84

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Baird	Batters
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clement
Comuzzi	Cummins
Davidson	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Hanger
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Jaffer
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Manning	Mark
Mayes	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Petit
Poillievre	Preston
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shipley	Skelton
Smith	Solberg
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Williams
Yelich— 121	

PAIRED

Members

Blaney	Freeman
Gravel	Guergis
Lalonde	Pallister
Picard	Prentice— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed from February 26 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: When this motion was last before the House, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina had the floor for questions and comments. There are two minutes remaining in the time allotted for questions and comments for the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak tonight with regard Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

When I was elected in 2000, this matter became an important issue for me and the House. I have followed this mission closely. I always looked to the leadership that was going to make these decisions. The Liberals took leadership first by agreeing with the mission in Afghanistan. Then our Prime Minister took it up, and he is doing much to help the people of Afghanistan.

A comment was made by an NDP member today during the debate. Although the word hopeless was not used, that party sounded hopeless.

I want to go back to when President Karzai was here and what he said to the House. He thanked Canada for its contributions and said:

—Afghanistan today is profoundly different from the terrified and exhausted country it was five years ago. Today, Afghanistan has the most progressive constitutions in our region, which enables the Afghan people to choose their leadership for the first time in their history. Over the past five years, our people have voted in two elections, one for the President and another for the Parliament. With the inauguration of the Parliament, 27 percent of whose membership is made up of women, all the three branches of state have now been established. More than six million children, about forty percent of them girls, have returned to school. Over four million refugees have returned to their homes. We have disarmed tens of thousands of former combatants, and have begun the vital task of building up Afghanistan's security institution—the Police and Army. We have also achieved fiscal stability and substantial economic growth. In short, we in Afghanistan have embraced the vision of a prosperous and pluralistic society which Canada so richly embodies.

I will be splitting my time, Mr. Speaker, with the member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

The government supports our troops and understands that they go to war to help countries such as Afghanistan, to defend their people, to build its bridges, to teach its troops, to help rebuild the devastation that the country has undergone, to give women back their rights and to give its children back their future.

Government Orders

Our troops and their compatriots from other countries are the bravest of the brave. It is their efforts and those of the people in Afghanistan that we defend.

Canada is in Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led United Nations sanctioned, multinational security assistance force. At the invitation of the democratically elected Afghanistan government, along with our international partners, Canada is helping Afghanistan build a stable, democratic and self-sufficient country.

Dr. Lee Windsor, deputy director of the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick, and a former soldier himself, described how, due to world events like the former Yugoslavia deterioration, aid did not come through for Afghanistan after the Afghan people helped defeat the communist threat during the Cold War.

Afghanistan collapsed into a state of civil war, ripe for the Taliban to take over. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, reminded Canadians of the impact this had on Afghanistan. In a *Globe and Mail* column on January 24, 2008, he said:

Afghanistan is a potent symbol of the costs inherent in abandoning nations to the lawless forces of anarchy. That alone justifies international efforts to help rebuild the country. Lest there be any doubt, remember Sept. 11, 2001, and its worldwide reverberations. We learned then how a country, shorn of its civic institutions, becomes a vacuum filled by criminals and opportunists. In its chaos and poverty, Afghanistan became a home base for terrorism.

● (1900)

Before the fall of the Taliban in 2001, women had virtually no rights in Afghanistan. Human rights abuses of women included being forbidden access to basic health care. They were forbidden to work outside the house. They were forbidden to go to school or to university. They were forbidden to leave their homes without a close male relative. They were forbidden fair trials and executed for sexual crimes. Public executions and floggings were the norm under the Taliban.

There is no negotiating with a terrorist organization and regime that treats its own people in this manner.

Today things are much different. We learned of real progress through personal reports and stories and just last week from the delegation of Afghan women visiting Parliament. Some of the important accomplishments include women representing 25% of the democratically elected national assembly and more than two million girls enrolled in school.

In 2006, as I said, Mr. Karzai, Afghanistan's president, had explained how Canada's assistance was helping his country and he thanked us for the contributions. He went on to talk about how Afghanistan had the most progressive constitution in the region, enabling the Afghan people to choose their leadership for the first time in their history. He talked about the parliament and how 27% of its membership was made up of women. He talked about the six million children, over 40% of them girls, who had returned to school and the over four million refugees who had returned to their homes. He talked about how the Afghans had disarmed thousands of former combatants and had begun the vital task of building up Afghanistan's security institution, the police and the army. They also achieved fiscal stability and substantial economic growth. In short, Afghans

had embraced the vision of a prosperous and pluralistic society, which Canada so richly embodies.

Canada is the top donor for the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan, which is helping Afghanistan's economy by helping Afghan people create their own jobs. Afghan women are taking control of their own lives by starting their own businesses through this program. More than 325,000 Afghan people have taken advantage of the program, 75% of microfinance clients being women, and significantly 98% of these loans being repaid with interest.

Another program, integrating women into markets, helps women develop horticulture, mostly fruits and vegetables in home-based gardens to supplement family diets and generate income.

In October of last year we were introduced to artizan designs, a project that provides skill development and weaving, income generation and literacy classes to Afghan women. Silk shawls were available for purchase. The proceeds go directly to help support the project in Kabul.

This is just one more example of how Canada's presence in Afghanistan is providing women with the opportunities to create, to produce and to earn money.

General Hillier, Chief of the Defence Staff, recently explained the important role of development in Afghanistan. He said:

We are in Afghanistan to help Afghans. We're not there to build an empire. We're not there to occupy a country. But we are there to help Afghan men, women and children rebuild their families.

General Hillier also clarified the connection between security at home and security in Afghanistan when he said, "We must be imparting the conditions for stability there before that instability is exported here".

I see I have been given a signal that my time is up and I am only halfway through my speech. If I would have had the attention of the House, I would have gone a little quicker, but everyone was talking and not listening to my important points.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to say a few words tonight in speaking about democratic change and the economic renewal and social progress to a nation that yearns for freedom and stability. Canadians can be proud that we have done so much to bring such change to so many. It is a legacy that we can celebrate and agree to sustain together.

● (1905)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I assure the member that I was listening. There is one item about which the member did not have an opportunity to talk. I am sure it is in the rest of her speech.

It has to do with the poppy trade. When we first had Afghanistan come as an issue on the floor of the House, I did a little research. I found out at the time that the vast majority of the economy of Afghanistan was growing poppies. The farmers got very little, but the Taliban used it to finance their war, their arms and to keep this going.

Government Orders

Is the member aware of the government's position on how to address the problem of the war by the Afghan insurgents being financed by poppies? Could it be addressed in some concrete way so there is a peace or a stability in the Afghan region in our lifetime?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, the poppy industry is a concern, which was expressed in the House when the president was here. It was of grave concern. I think it just goes to show that this is why we have to be there: to try to bring peace and help the Afghan people to try to get this under control.

With our help in training the Afghan national army and the Afghan nation police, we are working together to try to help. This is not something that can be very easily overcome. I am sure that is why the member asked the question: because he knows himself that this is not going to be very easy.

First of all, I think, we have a lot of work to do in bringing stability to Afghanistan and trying to make sure that we are there to help educate the people. Education certainly will help. If we can educate children and women and have an educated society, things like the poppy industry might not be the huge problem that we know it is.

• (1910)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague across the way. In 2003 I had an opportunity to visit Afghanistan. I visited the minister responsible for women's affairs. She was running a college and I spoke to the women of that college.

There were ladies in their late teens. When I asked them what the international community could do for Afghanistan, one young lady grabbed my hand and said, "Come with me". She took me outside the school and waited for a couple of minutes. We saw a convoy of four UN vehicles, with one in the front and one in the back, with mercenaries, if we want to call them that, who were protecting one NGO. She said, "If we can get rid of all of this, open businesses, work and have stability, we will be all right".

Could my colleague give us her thoughts on the comments by the young Afghan lady? What is the member's government doing in order to move in that direction?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I am not privy to exactly what the person was talking about, but I do know that if help is what they want, in financing that is where we have been. As I said earlier, we have been helping with micro-financing, which has helped many women start their own businesses. Therefore, I am sure that has been a very good start if that is what answer she wants. We have also done a lot with rebuilding the schools. All of these things are what will start to develop the economy.

The economy specifically has been something that we have zeroed in on through CIDA. Some of the projects have been helping. As soon as we get some of the infrastructure, such as water and wells, as soon as we create infrastructure to overcome these barriers, some of this economy can be built. I believe the member actually has brought to light the fact that this is what we are doing. We are helping with our micro-financing support.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise today to speak on an issue that is

obviously so important to Canadians, but in particular to me given my family's history. I know that you in particular, Mr. Speaker, know some of that history. I would like to share it with the House, because I feel personally very fortunate that my family was able to come to Canada.

The country gave us a brand new start. As members know, in the early 1970s, shortly after I was born in East Africa, a radical dictator came to power. His name was Idi Amin. For a short time we lived under that incredible regime. Then we were kicked out. Luckily, we were able to come to Canada with our lives and what we could carry. I do not remember much, being just a baby, of course, but my family recounts the story of how we had to go through absolute hell and how we lost everything that we could ever have imagined.

Three generations of an institution in that country, our families and businesses, were ripped away from us overnight. That sort of damage can never be repaired unless one has the aid of others to help fix a radical situation such as the one that had developed under the dictator named Idi Amin. At the time, there was a lot of debate as to what should happen in the international community. Should we be involved? Should we throw the dictator out?

Luckily, Canada opened its arms to my family, to me and to others who came as refugees to Canada. We were able to have a brand new start. It took the intervention of a few African countries close to Uganda, which were able to throw out that dictator and try to help get Ugandans and their families back on the right track after a terrible reign of about six to eight years under Idi Amin.

His reign turned that whole country backward. It was supposedly the jewel of Africa, but it was turned backward and unfortunately became one of the poorer countries in Africa. Everything that was built there by a number of families who got along well and worked hard was turned overnight into an area that is still not quite back on its feet.

I was very lucky that I was able to travel with the Prime Minister recently to the heads of the Commonwealth meeting in Uganda and see some of the progress that Canada is involved with there on the ground. I saw some of the help that we are involved with providing through CIDA and other NGOs. I saw that slowly but surely the stability there is bringing better economic times and people are hopeful about the future. Again, Canada has been a beacon of hope for many in that region.

The reason I wanted to share that story briefly with the House is that I see many similarities with what the people of Afghanistan are faced with. Of course, many of them have known only war. If we think about the last 30 years of Afghanistan's history, we will realize that it has been fighting to stay alive. It has been battling different elements that have put many people's lives through incredible hardship. Yet the spirit of the Afghan people continues to live on and to say that they can have a better place, a strong economy and a free democracy, something that especially in the recent past has been so important to them.

When I speak about the historic visit last week, it really hit me when we returned home. As my colleague from Blackstrap mentioned, it was incredible to hear the stories from the delegation of Afghan women parliamentarians who were here.

Government Orders

To remind the House, in the values that we are fighting for in Afghanistan with the Afghan people in the process of capacity building and helping to improve their quality of life, there are three key things that I think are often forgotten when we debate whether we should remain in Afghanistan in the future or remove ourselves. Those things are defence, diplomacy and development, the 3Ds, and they are all equally important.

When I look back to my family's history and at what has happened in Uganda, all these things had to happen to continue to turn Uganda around. It continues to happen today. The work that I mentioned is still happening.

Rome was not built in a day. If we were to look at what has happened in the last number of years and what Canada and its coalition partners have contributed in Afghanistan, we would not recognize Afghanistan as it was under the Taliban. In only six years, things have changed drastically since the coalition efforts in Afghanistan.

Members do not have to take just my word for it. Again, the women who here last week told incredible stories about the things that have changed. The fact is that they can now go out in public. They can participate in shaping the country and their governance structures, yet they still do not live completely without fear.

● (1915)

This story in particular is amazing. Someone I became very fond of when she was here, for her passion and for dedicating her whole lifetime to trying to improve the plight of her people, was Safia Sediqi, one of the lead parliamentarians. She told us that some of them have bounties on their heads. The Taliban know about the work they have been doing and have bounties on their heads. She said that the women have to travel with security and are always afraid about the condition of their families while they are doing their work.

We get up every day and many of us walk to work here. We are free to do so. We can come and go as we please. Let us imagine these women having a bounty on their heads just because they are fighting for rights for themselves and their people. It is just unimaginable. Not only that, when we were taking pictures with the delegation, they had to ensure that they were dressed in the appropriate way, that their scarves were covering them properly, because if the Taliban saw these pictures, again they would be targeted for potential "extermination". One of them used that term.

It is incredible to think about the types of things these women are facing and the courage they have. And what was their message while they were here? It was clear. They thanked Canada profusely for our leadership in that part of the world.

They thanked Canada for the fact that over the last number of years we have been involved in bringing security and involved in bringing what is needed in order for Afghans to get their lives back on track, things such as development aid in allowing girls to go to school and allowing education and school systems to be set up, and also the infrastructure, due to a significant amount of work that our troops have been involved with, as have NGOs that are on the ground building infrastructure.

All of these things, they said, would not be possible, and they would not even be able to serve as members of parliament, if it were

not for the leadership of Canada, other NATO countries and the UN in particular, in regard to taking the leadership to say that all of the world should be interested in helping this wayward state get back on track.

When they spoke to our caucus last week, I do not think there was a dry eye in the place when we heard that message. We heard it so articulately. They asked us not to leave them now. If we were to leave them now, they said, everything would be lost. Not only that, they would be suffering in ways that we could only imagine. That is what they told us. From their stories, I could just see what they were talking about, because it is just something we take for granted here.

In particular, however, it gave me an incredible new sense of hope in thinking about what we can continue to do. Canada's history as a nation has been one of coming to people's aid and bringing hope for democracy and freedom. This is a perfect example of that history in today's reality in some parts of the world, where there are still incredible amounts of conflict. My friend from Blackstrap spoke about the pluralistic society that we are so lucky to have in Canada.

As well, I think about the progress that has happened in Afghanistan in a short period of time. About 15 years ago, my family, along with others, sponsored a number of Afghan refugees who came to Canada. Obviously they were fleeing the regime of the Taliban. Many of them worked with our family. Many of them live all across this country.

Fifteen to twenty years later, they are established. They are proud to be Canadians. Some of them have done extremely well. They have businesses for themselves. Some have partnerships and some still work with my family back in Edmonton.

However, many of them were in tears with me when they saw the leadership that Canada was taking in their home country. For many of them, it is the first time that they have actually gone back to Afghanistan to help in the capacity building. They have told me that never in their lifetimes would they have imagined that Afghanistan would change the conditions that they had to flee when they left under the Taliban.

They never imagined that they would be able to go back to their home country. They closed the chapter when they came to Canada. They just wished for the best and prayed that maybe things would change. Now when they speak to me, they say that if it were not for Canada and its leadership, they would not ever be able to go back to their country, as they can now, and give to it what Canada gave to us here: the experience, the knowledge and the ability, while they are still connected and still Canadian citizens, to be able to work with our soldiers, our men and women on the ground there, and to give Afghanistan, their country, brand new hope and excitement for the future.

I think this has become abundantly clear to Canadians since we have had this debate. I would like to remind everyone that, through the leadership of our ministers involved and our Prime Minister, this has been an open process, a transparent process to be able to bring Canadians together to speak about the work that we are doing and support our men and women in the field in Afghanistan in the tough work they do.

Government Orders

I am happy to see that this motion will pass on Thursday night so we can continue to give hope to people in Afghanistan and that region of the world, because that is going to be so important as we move forward.

• (1920)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying how much it meant to me to listen to the member's personal point of view. I know he brings a lot of heart and feeling to this because he has experienced it and he knows people who have experienced this very situation. He was one of a number of MPs, like myself, who met the female MPs from Afghanistan last week. That was a truly moving experience.

He also talked about how Rome was not built in a day. I have been to Rome a number of times and I have seen buildings that took 400 years to be built. What we have accomplished in Afghanistan is we have built thousands of kilometres of roads. We have built schools where millions of kids are going to school. That is all at risk of being lost.

My understanding is that two of the parties in this House are going to vote against this mission. Does the member think that is consistent with Canada's identity in the world?

• (1925)

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent question. The member mentioned the progress happening in Afghanistan, but in particular the historic visit of the Afghan parliamentarian women's group that came here.

I find it hard to believe that those parties still maintain the same position. If I am not mistaken, the delegation of women went in particular to speak with the leader of the Bloc and with the leader of the NDP to share the same stories that all of us heard when it came to how important it is for Canada to remain in the significant role as we have been and continue that work in order to help them succeed to bring democracy and freedom to their people. After hearing that message how those parties could maintain their position is beyond me.

I have been on a few panels in the past where NDP members have said that we have to start a peace process. I think there still needs to be a focus on giving a sense of security. When the women parliamentarians are saying there are bounties on their heads and their families are still at threat, how can we negotiate any sort of peace process?

I appreciate the hon. member raising it because I wanted to mention that even after hearing from such brave and courageous women, it is a shock to me that those party leaders still maintain a position that we should remove ourselves from Afghanistan.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know time is short but I want to congratulate my colleague, the caucus chair of the Conservative Party, for his excellent speech this evening. Perhaps many people do not know that his fiancée, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade, was instrumental in getting the six Afghan female MPs here last week during International Women's Week.

I know you had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to be in the chair at the end of question period and introduce them not only to our House,

but by television to our country. As the member said, their stories were so moving. It was incredible to be able to talk to them and try not to be moved to the extent that it would bring tears to our eyes when they talked about the courage it takes for them just to go to work every day. Sometimes we like to complain in this place about the amount of snow outside and how difficult it is to wade through the snow and the slop to get to work every day, but unless we get hit by a wayward bus, we do not face the type of danger that those parliamentarians do. I admire them so much for their courage.

The member touched on the issue that I have been raising throughout this debate and that is the whole idea the NDP has floated that somehow we can negotiate with the Taliban. In the limited time he has remaining could the member comment on that? Personally I do not see, because of the ideological differences and because it is such an evil regime that would murder people almost for no reason, how we could possibly share power with a regime like that.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, in my limited time, at this stage in the development of Afghanistan I do not think we can even look at creating any sort of peace process until there is stability and through the continuous efforts with the NGOs on the ground, education and the basic needs of the Afghan people are being met. Once we get to that stage and once we establish the tools for capacity building as we are moving into now, then we can start looking at ways to look at maybe even removing our military presence there. However, it is just too fragile a place at this point in time. To try to think that we can negotiate with a group like the Taliban, we would be lucky to stay alive if we were in the same room with them.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is for me a very special occasion to participate in this important debate on Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Not since the former Yugoslavia and Korea has our flag been placed in a zone of conflict where, by terms of engagement, there has been a full application of military force by Canadians.

We want to remember why we are in Afghanistan. There did exist and perhaps still exists an international terrorist conspiracy based there, which was aided and abetted by the government in Afghanistan. Out of that conspiracy came an attack on New York and Washington. There have been other attacks in other locations around the world as well.

In the New York attack, approximately 3,000 people died, some of whom were Canadian. The United Nations could not allow Afghanistan impunity by allowing this group to act and it was necessary to act, in the view of this House, Canada and the United Nations, to uproot the terrorists and bring them to account. That is why the United Nations, NATO and our American cousins are active militarily in Afghanistan at this time.

As a member of Parliament, I had the privilege of being embedded with the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan a couple of years ago. It was certainly a memorable experience. I was proud to be there with a very impressive group of Canadian armed forces personnel. At the time, they were based in Camp Julian in Kabul. I was there the night that the first convoy moved to Kandahar. It was troubling.

Mr. Speaker, I should say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Welland.

Government Orders

One night, and I will not say what time it was because we are not supposed to say what time things happen, but at some point in the middle of the night the engines started up and it woke up the whole camp. Some in the camp were aware that the convoy was moving out. There was a sense then, as there still is today, that the mission, in moving from Camp Julian in Kabul to Kandahar was to be a very serious commitment with very serious risks. I recall at the time being concerned about the possibility of an ambush on that particular convoy as it made its way for the first time down what I think is called Highway 1 from Kabul to Kandahar.

During that time with the forces, which I was very proud to experience with two other parliamentarians, I bounced around in an Iltis and on the back of a LAV-3, a light armoured vehicle, as a flying sentry. We moved around Kabul and in the rural areas of the region. I was proud to be with the Canadian Forces as I eyeballed the people and places and breathed the dust of Afghanistan in trying to understand all that is there. It is a complex piece, indeed.

I certainly found, as have some who have gone there, that at times one can be optimistic and at other times pessimistic about prospects for the future. I recall when the president of Afghanistan was here, I was particularly optimistic when I listened to his speech. When I was there, the obstacles to progress, economic development and peace seemed huge, but with the presence of the international community, occasionally one sees a glimmer of hope.

● (1930)

There are two things I took away from that particular stint in Afghanistan. First, the Afghan people themselves are resilient and industrious. There is no question about that. It gives reason for optimism. Everybody seemed to be working at something, at least the men. The women and the young girls were less visible, often in the home, but the men and the boys all seemed to be working at something. However menial the task, they were working. They are industrious. They will build their country. I came away with that very clear conclusion.

The second thought that I came away with was the high level of heroin production in the south of Afghanistan, which by itself, the hugeness of it, the scope of it, and the amount of money involved is so large that it will impair the evolution of good governance. It is essentially one big huge implantation of organized crime in the south of the country. It is a problem that Afghanistan and the Afghans will have to deal with. It will distort the evolution of the economy and the politics and the good governance of that country. It is not intractable, but it is a big problem.

I will move to some conclusions. Of course, if 9/11 had not occurred, we would not be in Afghanistan. Afghanistan would be evolving as Afghanistan always has in the will of the Afghanistan people. However, we are there, and it is probably true that we will not be there forever.

The resolution that we have crafted in the House appears to be a rough consensus. The international community may always have some presence in trying to assist Afghanistan now that we are there, but there appears to be a sense that there must be a rotation among our allies for this purpose.

The motion we have before us frames the next many months as a three year commitment. It is our hope that the Afghans will continue to construct a civil society infrastructure within an envelope of security and over time that responsibility for security and the full package will evolve to the Afghans, as it should be.

I want to pay tribute to our Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. I want to pay tribute to the people of Afghanistan. It seems that the people of Afghanistan have put up with soldiers, guys with guns, for decades and decades and decades. I only have to go back half a century or so to notice the Russians, their own civil war, the Taliban, and now NATO, also with guns.

I want to pay tribute to the Afghan police and the Afghan army as they evolve to take on this very large task of providing security for their civil governance. That is an ongoing task.

I pay tribute to our own Canadian Forces with NATO. Often not mentioned are our special forces, JTF2. I pay tribute to them tonight. They have been on the job there for quite a while. They are not mentioned because most of what special forces do is classified. Our provincial reconstruction teams are there, and I pay tribute to them.

Last, I say that there will be no military solution. The military application of force is tactical, intended to allow Afghans an opportunity to develop and to rebuild their system of governance.

We are not going to be armchair generals in this place. The motion that we may approve, and I hope we will approve, says that we are not armchair generals. We will give to our forces the orders. We will tell them what we want them to do and then we will let them do it, using appropriate military procedures as they see fit, but the term will come to an end.

In the hope that we will rotate and continue to contribute to the development of Afghanistan with our NATO allies, I hope that this resolution as negotiated on both sides of the House will be adopted.

● (1935)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to listen to the member for Scarborough—Rouge River speak and the member for Edmonton—Strathcona before him.

I was hoping that the member for Scarborough—Rouge River might pick up the challenge that was presented by the absolute assertion by the member who spoke before him, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, that we could not possibly negotiate with the Taliban and that anyone who thinks that we could possibly launch a peace process does not have any idea of what is going on there.

I listened carefully and I completely agree with the member for Scarborough—Rouge River when he says that we cannot be armchair generals. He may or may not have been in the House earlier this afternoon when I quoted a number of generals and a number of defence ministers who stated that it literally was immoral. I want to ensure that I do not misquote the Dutch commander in Uruzgan who said that if the international community cannot find a political solution, then we have no moral right to ask our young people to expose themselves to that danger.

Government Orders

We have had numerous other comments from the U.K. defence minister, a Dutch military commander, and Major General Andrew Leslie, former chief of Canadian land staff, who himself said, “Every time you kill an angry young man overseas, you’re creating 15 more who will come after you”.

I am sure the member also had the opportunity to meet with the courageous, intelligent six women members of parliament from Afghanistan when they were here. They said that it was absolutely a mistake to say that we cannot negotiate with the Taliban. They said that we needed to make a distinction between those who do not support the Taliban but who fight with the Taliban because they are starving and they need jobs and a livelihood.

I want to ask the member whether he is prepared to acknowledge that there is a difference between the Taliban, with whom it is necessary to negotiate and get a peace—

• (1940)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I would have to agree with the member that we will not achieve a strategic objective using military force, strategic objective meaning a pacification and development of civil governance in Afghanistan through the application of military force. It has never happened in history. Military force does not achieve strategic ends. The one exception may be the nuclear bomb, which we have not used for 65 years or so. We are not sure whether it works strategically.

If we are to succeed strategically in Afghanistan, it is only within a tactical envelope provided by military security that the Afghanistan people will be able to develop their system of civil governance. If civil governance means including some Taliban presence, then talking, voting and negotiating, all of that is possible for the Afghan citizens. They will make those decisions themselves.

I tend to agree with the hon. member that negotiating, voting or whatever with the Taliban is never out of the question.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talked about negotiating with the Taliban. In fact, the Afghan parliamentarian whose husband was arrested, tortured and murdered by the Taliban, spoke directly to the leader of the New Democratic Party and asked him, given that circumstance, what he thought of that situation. His response to her was, “Well, dear, I think you should just negotiate harder or talk to them harder.

I would ask my hon. colleague what he thinks of that comment.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, the losses incurred by people through military violence, insurgency or terrorism are never ever recoverable. They are gone. Sometimes people will regard them as investments in a cause but those losses are losses and we grieve them dearly.

However, in terms of building the future, we would never have rebuilt Europe and the Americans would never have rebuilt their country after the Civil War if they could not deal with the people they fought with. That is true of every conflict around the world. I have a sense that will happen some way, somehow in Afghanistan if we can allow them in Afghanistan that opportunity by providing enough security to allow them to start building.

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will begin my comments today by acknowledging our tremendous debt of gratitude to the men and women of the Canadian Forces who risk their lives to create a safer and more secure world for Canadians and people throughout the globe.

The Liberal Party remains steadfast in our support for the Canadian Forces personnel stationed in Afghanistan as they work toward the noble goal of bringing peace and stability to this troubled region, and we recognize their accomplishments in this regard. When our forces return, we do and will afford them the appreciation and respect they have earned once again.

We are most cognizant of the lives of our sons and daughter given in combat to achieve this safer and more secure world. We do not want to undo all the good that they have done, not now, not ever. Further, we hope that the families of our soldiers who gave their lives find consolation.

I further wish to acknowledge the notable role our Canadian diplomats have played and continue to play in Afghanistan, especially Mr. Glyn Berry who made the supreme sacrifice on our behalf and on behalf of the Afghans.

It is important to realize that Canadians were also killed on 9/11 when members of al-Qaeda attacked the United States at the World Trade Centre and that these terrorists were trained in Afghanistan. If the NATO forces were to unilaterally withdraw, there is no doubt that al-Qaeda and the Taliban would walk right back in.

We have also arrested alleged insurgents in our own country, such as the 16 accused terrorists in Toronto. The entire globe is at risk of terrorist attacks, including Canada. Our involvement in Afghanistan is part of the war on terrorism. We are there to help eliminate the breeding grounds of terrorists and their activities. We are there to protect both countries and both peoples, Afghans and Canadians.

Canada made a commitment to the international community and especially to our NATO allies. Canada must honour this commitment. If Canada closed down our participation in the UN-mandated and NATO-led mission immediately, as the NDP and Bloc Québécois would have us do, we would take on the reputation of being a less than reliable ally in assisting nations that are struggling to move to democratic principles: the rule of law, human rights and the empowerment of women, including the equality of education for boys and girls.

An immediate withdrawal is also unrealistic. Deploying a replacement force in the wake of an immediate Canadian departure would be nearly impossible and would leave the Afghans at the mercy of the Taliban. We cannot abandon the people of Afghanistan as there is much to be done.

The Liberal opposition continues to support our Canadian armed forces in Afghanistan as part of a NATO force for the stated term of our nation’s commitment. I believe it is important for Canada to play a role in building peace and security in the area so that reconstruction efforts can continue. This mission was initially multi-dimensional, embracing the 3D model, combining defence, diplomacy and development in a coordinated effort to bring long term peace and stability to a fragile state.

Government Orders

The Afghan people want peace and a future for themselves and their children. Canada must help facilitate this. I can support this kind of approach that reflects a Canadian philosophy.

All that being said, it is incumbent upon the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its member nations to preserve the rotation principle. Canadian troops have been performing most effectively, doing the heavy lifting in the combat zone of the bloody combat region. It is time for other partners to step up to the plate. Other nations must do their share. Other nations must take over these positions of responsibility. It is simply the fair, equitable and right thing to do.

In not doing so, member countries in future engagements will not take on such missions and the future of NATO itself could be at risk. I am confident, however, that our NATO partners will make the appropriate response, and we thank them for this.

The debate to this date has too often had the flavour of vicious partisanship, with more than a sprinkle of intemperate comments. It is time to tone down the rhetoric and time for all to put a little water in their wine. The Afghan issue should be above politics. It is time for a responsible change of direction.

The report of John Manley and his co-panellists have opened the door for a possible consensus, and we thank them for their contributions to the debate. We acknowledge their encouragement for greater transparency on issues surrounding the Afghanistan conflict, which will promote a better understanding of the situation by Canadians.

We must continue to be mindful of the need to respect international law and, in effecting the transfer of Afghan detainees, we must be mindful that the torture of enemy combatants by any military force cannot be tolerated.

As referenced in a recital to this motion under debate, which I feel we all can agree to, is an appreciation that the ultimate aim of Canadian policy is to leave Afghanistan to Afghans in a country that is better governed, more peaceful and more secure, and to create the necessary space and conditions to allow the Afghans themselves to achieve a political solution to the conflict.

● (1945)

We further recognize that in order to achieve this objective, it is essential that properly trained and equipped participants of their security apparatus, such as the army, police, judicial and correctional systems, be in place. Our military presence will help the Afghans achieve this end.

The motion calls for a continued presence in Kandahar until July 2011 on condition that the government notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in Kandahar as of July 2011 with replacement by Afghan forces and the complete redeployment of our troops by December 2011. I would have preferred something sooner, much sooner, but I am pleased that a firm mandate has been established. I would not support an never-ending mission.

Further, the condition of rotation of an additional 1,000 NATO troops into Kandahar will allow our Canadian Forces to be deployed in a more balanced way to a return to mission co-priorities of training and reconstruction, in effect, a return to the 3Ds of defence,

diplomacy and development. There is no exclusive military solution to this conflict. I have reservations, however, as to whether 1,000 additional troops will allow this to happen.

The conditions that the government must secure medium helicopter lift capacity and unmanned aerial vehicles will further protect our forces.

The motion also references other prudent measures, including the need to address the issue of the narco-economy that undermines progress in Afghanistan, the need to meet the highest international standards to protect the rights of detainees and a greater level of accountability, clarity and scrutiny so that all Canadians can be sure that our nation's contributions are continuing to be effective.

There has been a huge national discussion on Afghanistan, not only in the House but throughout the country, and it is time to bring this to a conclusion while being mindful that our future path will not be easy. I feel this motion reflects common ground between the Liberal official opposition and the Conservative government and provides clear direction in terms of engagement. The NDP and the Bloc advocate a position that is simply not tenable at this time.

● (1950)

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I followed most of my colleague's speech and the problem I had is when he started talking about the fact that it is unfortunate that this particular debate over the last while has become partisan, that people have taken some pretty strong positions and said what I think he called intemperate remarks.

I will tell a story and then culminate with a question and perhaps shed some light on why some of us get fairly emotional about this. I do not believe it is partisan in the party versus party position because I know a lot of Liberal members in particular, even before we started working toward finding a compromise position that both parties could support, at least privately held positions not unlike my own, as did many from the Conservative Party.

I do not think it is partisan in that sense but this is an issue that gets emotional very quickly. When he says that he thinks it is incumbent upon all of us to put a little water in our wine, I do not think that is a proper term to use in connection with this particular debate.

I will use the example that I have used before in the House. When my wife and I were out for dinner with the Afghan ambassador, Omar Samad, and his wife Korshied, the phone rang and yet another tragedy had unfolded in Afghanistan. Two young girls were walking home from school and a motorcycle went by with two gentlemen in robes. The machine gun opened up and killed those two young girls. That is the reason we are there. That exemplifies why our young men and women are putting their lives at risk.

What was the crime? The crime was that two little girls wanted an education. It is pretty simple to understand. That is why some of us get so emotional about defending this mission of why our people are there and why they should continue to be there. The member may want to use the term "partisan" but we get very emotional when some people in this place suggest that we pull out immediately.

Government Orders

Mr. John Maloney: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with my honourable colleague that it has become and is a very emotional issue. I agree with the situation and the little story that he told is a good reason for being there. Also, it is very emotional when our troops come home in a casket draped with a Canadian flag, and that is very emotional for many Canadians.

We are there for the right reasons and I am saying put a little water in the wine. I am referencing the need, desire, and how we hopefully have achieved consensus. Certainly, as the member is aware, our party supported a withdrawal by 2009, and giving NATO notice of that over a year ago. We did not do that. We are happy now that there is a firm date. Many of us may not be happy when that date is, but we have striven to reach a consensus, and we will continue to do so.

As I said, we do not question why our troops are there. We feel that there are some other countries that should be stepping up to the plate, as I indicated in my address. NATO is an organization of 26 nations. It is simply not right that Canadians should be taking it on the chin day after day when others are certainly most capable of doing that as well.

• (1955)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great delight that I participate in this debate on the one hand, yet on the other hand it is also with great difficulty. Not long ago a member of my extended family, Sergeant Christos Kariygiannis, was killed in the line of duty. I know firsthand what a family goes through.

When the Manley report was engaged and it was reported in late January, not wanting to skew the issue on one side or the other side, I sent a general questionnaire to my constituents saying that we had been in Afghanistan for so many years. I asked my constituents some questions and also for their comments. In the time that I have, I would like to read some of these comments and invite my colleagues to also engage their constituents because empowerment of the constituent is a very important thing.

I would like to read what Elizabeth wrote to me. Her email came to me on Monday, February 11. She wrote:

Canadian commitment to Afghanistan mission to support and defeat Taliban and other political issues is honorable mission. Canada always and has been peace full country. The land of opportunity and better living to all citizen but I feel this mission left Canada in between conflict of political issues that will reflect our security in Canada.

Canada did not create this situation in Afghanistan and loosing our troops for difficult and almost hopeless mission there is not point for our troops to be there.

Also I feel Afghanistan should be ready to make the changes in there country, if Afghanistan is not ready to make the changes, it will be difficult to our troops bring the peace in that country.

Yes, I feel Canadian troops should come back home and return to their family and country that they cherish and serve.

I don't want my words to be misunderstood all I want to say is

If Afghanistan is ready to make the changes then yes let our troops stay and help them to achieve the goal and better living and I assure you there will be less Canadian soldiers to die in mission than now.

On the same day Patricia wrote:

I agree that we need more support for our troops in Afghanistan; however, I believe that leaving Afghanistan in 2009 would be a death sentence to the people of Afghanistan. We committed to helping the country and we cannot leave until the job is done or it becomes apparent that we cannot do any more good.

It is a shame that we have been forced into a combat position, since we are primarily peacekeepers; however, I do not believe it's in the best interest of Canada or Afghanistan to abandon them. We need to finish what we started.

Zakir wrote:

Should Canada remove its troops from Afghanistan immediately: NO—to do so is to lose to extremists and set a bad example. We can only leave when the Afghan govt. can support itself. We can only reduce if others pick up the burden. If NATO will not support, we must leave immediately.

First of all, let me start by saying I believe the original Canadian commitment to the Afghanistan mission in support of the effort to defeat the Taliban is a just and worthy mission. The mission and the cause remains even more valid today and perhaps even more vital as Afghanistan once again titters on the brink of the precipice of chaos with the Taliban once again regaining ascendancy.

On February 11, R. K. wrote:

Should we provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan? Yes.

Should our mission be extended a day longer? No.

Should we remove our troops? Yes.

This is where he qualifies his answers.

1-Afghanistan has no link with 911: it has not committed any crime against Canada or US or any other country. They inherited Osama, as he was stationed there already, based on what I read in newspapers, with CIAs help. Infact, Afghan Jarga after 911 offered to hand over Osama to Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi which US refused arrogantly. Instead they choose to do carpet bombing day and night and destroy the already one of the poorest country's left over infrastructure and people homes. Today we have no proof that he is there anyway.

2-War on terror is infact a criminal case against the 911 perpetrators and should be run in court of Hague and not in battlefield. Like we did with Serbian leader forgot his name. And we should issue warrants to arrest the criminals. But US never went to International court, infact it set up illegal courts and illegal jails. After all we are in 21st civilized era and not in Genghis Khan's age. Are we?

• (2000)

Muhammad F. wrote in an email on January 26:

I agree to the point that Canada should shift its role from military to civilian in Afghanistan. Power can not be a solution when majority of the inhabitants of land are on opposite side. I think the problem is that we try to see them according to our wish and want them to live the way we like to live. It can be true for other creatures where one can train them to live in an unfamiliar way, away from their natural tendencies but for human beings this can not be true.

In my humble opinion, Canada should emphasize other stake holders to negotiate with all major parties in Afghanistan, listen to their point of view, promoting a dialog and help in reaching a solution which is acceptable to majority regardless we like that majority or not. If freedom of expression, exercise of basic human rights and democracy is valuable to us then we should let other nations do the same as long as they don't unite on injustice.

On January 25 Ralph wrote:

I like the remark—"When bellies are full, no one will hold a gun".

That, basically, is my view with regards to the present conflict(s) in the middle east. Today, we are fighting a "ghost". Our troops very often never see their attackers. We, in the West, do not understand nor seem to want to understand their way of life which is so much different that our way. Tribal chiefs reign supreme. It is a society much like our own European society was, some 800 to 1,000 years ago. How do we fight when we do not really know the enemy. I have said many times to others, that it is cheaper to provide bread than bullets to kill. Then you make friends — not enemies. We are in this thing pretty deep and it will not be easy to change our strategies but it can be done.

Government Orders

We must — make friends with everyone. We must not dictate as to how they must govern. We should teach human rights and that will not be easy. If we can gain the trust of the Taliban and try to help them to appreciate that human rights with dignity and fairness to all citizens (in particular the oppressed women) is a must in a civilized society, then, we just may win this war without any further blood shed.

On January 22 Benny wrote:

Thank you for your hard work trying to help solve the Afghan situation.

Although I watch the news quite often, all issues related to Afghanistan seems to be all Canadian. I have not noticed any activities of other nations in that country. Are we the only country fighting there? I hope not.

My poll contained simple questions: “Should we provide additional assistance to Afghanistan?” Over 70% of constituents said “yes”. “Should we extend our mission longer?”. About 45% said “no”. “Should our mission be changed from peacemaking to peacekeeping?” Some 75% said “yes”. “Should we move our troops immediately?” Again, 45% said “yes”.

As a parliamentarian, an individual who has been elected to represent his constituents, I listen to their wishes. I hear the motion put forward by the government. I hear our motion and I feel comfortable in noticing that the mission says that we should extend for another two years and engage other countries and say to them that it is not only Canada's war, it is also NATO's war.

This is a war that also needs other men and women in the theatre. This is a war where engagement should also be done by other members of NATO.

I use the word “war” because we are in that situation. I am not sure if peacekeeping is the right word because we are not in a place where people are on difference sides and we are in the middle keeping the peace. On the Island of Cyprus we were there for about 30 years plus. We had the invading Turks from the north and the people who lived in Cyprus divided by the green line. Canadians travelled from one side of the country to the other on that green line, in the buffer zone, keeping the peace between the two factions. We lost many soldiers there.

In this situation, we are not keeping the peace. We are there in an engagement. Yet, when we help build schools, roads and other reconstruction, it is a little difficult to tell the troops not to engage and if they see anybody to come back in tomorrow. It is difficult to come to grips with a situation like this.

I lost a member of my family in that conflict. He was a young man who did not have the opportunity to witness life, a young man who gave his life for this country, a young man who, when he was asked and the call came in, did not hesitate. He did not say, “Why am I going there?”. He did not say, “I think you guys are wrong up in Ottawa. I think Canada is making the wrong decision” or “Why are we there when other countries from NATO are not?”.

● (2005)

The young men and women of the armed forces we have ordered in the engagement in Afghanistan do not question why we send them there, yet in the House, we take political sides. It does not matter if we are on the right side of the Speaker or the left side of the Speaker, the NDP or the Bloc, we all have our motive for wanting to either extend the mission, end the mission, or bring some sort of cohesion to the mission.

It is with great pride that I speak here tonight on this matter, not only because I am a parliamentarian and we ask constituents to give us their views. It is also because I had the experience in 2003 to go to Afghanistan, not with the government, not with the armed forces, but on my own. I am probably one of the few parliamentarians who went to Kabul on his own. I was there with friends. We had an opportunity to meet with President Karzai. We also met with parliamentarians and with women parliamentarians and saw the work they were doing. We spoke to them about their trials and tribulations and their wishes. Their wishes are not any different from ours. They want a better tomorrow for their children. They want a better tomorrow for their grandchildren. They want to have peace. They want to have some money in the bank. They want to have a better living. They want to have a car. They want to have a house and a roof over their head.

What I witnessed at those early stages of the engagement of NATO in Afghanistan was that a certain part of town was rebuilt and the south part of Kabul was totally destroyed. There were still remnants back then, and there are more now, of the Taliban. However, one of the things I would like to encourage the government to do, as well as other colleagues in the House, is to have the engagement of the Taliban.

The Taliban are right now outlawed and we cannot talk to them. That is the government's prerogative. However, if we are fighting ghosts, if we are not bringing them to the negotiating table, if we are not speaking to them, if we are not asking them to partake, then what are we doing? We can continue to carpet bomb and we can continue to destroy.

Maybe we should think about engaging them. I know the Taliban is a terrible word. Imagine Osama bin Laden being in government. I have problems with that. However, there are other factions of the Taliban that we can engage, speak to and invite to be part of.

I will add one more comment, and I ask my hon. colleagues to think about it. When soldiers die, we fly them in to the Trenton air base. Then we drive them along the Highway of Heroes. A lot of our men and women, be they in the military, or in the police, or in the fire department, line up, as do seniors and young people, and they wave the flag as the remains of the soldier pass by. I think it would be very befitting if we also think about lowering the flag on the Peace Tower every time we lose a soldier.

As a privy councillor, as with a lot of colleagues, when I pass away, the flag on the Peace Tower will be at half-mast. I would trade that honour for my cousin who died, any time. It was with great dissatisfaction when Sergeant Christos Kariannis passed away that the flag was not lowered. It is with great dissatisfaction that when our men and women give their lives when we have asked them to go there, when we have put them in harm's way, that we do not have the fortitude and the will to lower the flag at half-mast.

There is a motion before the House, and I would encourage all my colleagues to look at it and to support it.

Government Orders

• (2010)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I start my comment, I extend the government's deep condolences and share the pain of the loss of a Canadian soldier, including his cousin. Every time there is a loss of life of a Canadian soldier, it impacts all of us. It is like losing a member of our family, as we all support our troops. It is always a sorrow for Canada as a whole and we would like to extend our condolences to the family for this loss.

My colleague spoke about talking with the Taliban. He said that we needed to engage the enemy. We have an enemy that does not want to come to the table. We have an enemy with a different set of rules. It has a totally different idea of how a society should be. This is the group that has proved, when it was in power, how murderous it was. It does not hold values that are dear to Canada, to Canadians or to the international community.

These people have a very narrow thinking of the world. They want women to be put behind burkas. They do not want women to go to school. They do not want development because it threatens their power.

I do not understand how we would talk to these people who refuse to come to the table. It is always a good thing to bring people in to talk about peace, to talk about peacekeeping, but we cannot do it with people who are not willing to so. Those who are willing to come to the table, an opportunity is there. Mr. Karzai has extended his hand. The government has asked all of us to come to the table, and it will take a little time. As Afghanistan develops, I am sure the majority of those who are fighting for the very few who do not want to talk with the leadership will probably come on this side, but we cannot talk to this leadership.

Perhaps the member can enlighten us as to how we can talk to Omar Mohammed. Maybe we can give him a call, if he has a phone number or something. I do not know. However, how do we talk to somebody who does not want to come to the table?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his condolences.

I was a little confused. He said that they do not want to come to the table, and as Karzai extends his hand, maybe tomorrow they will be willing to come to the table.

I have read account after account. I have seen that Karzai has made some overtures to them, and I could be wrong, but I have not seen anywhere that we seriously have engaged the Taliban. Maybe we are not ready to engage them. Maybe we need to exterminate them all.

However, I do want to speak about another set of difficulties that exist just a little south of Afghanistan, where we have listed these people as extremists. They want to talk. They want to negotiate. They want the government to get involved, and it is doing nothing. The only thing the government is doing is listing these people, and that is the LTTE. I am sure the parliamentary secretary is fully aware of the LTTE, the troubles that are happening in Sri Lanka and the killings on all sides. The LTTE reached out to us and asked us to assist them. The only thing the government did was list them and turn a blind eye to them.

The Conservatives can suck and blow all they want, but unless they engage, unless they speak and unless they bring them to the table, they will accomplish nothing.

• (2015)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in Parliament and talk about our armed forces. All of us truly respect the role that they play. At the same time, we are parliamentarians and we have to come to grips with the nature of the mission and the nature of the direction that we can take.

A Liberal member stood up a while ago and said that the New Democratic Party, in taking a position of withdrawal from Afghanistan, demonstrated its inability to govern our country. It demonstrated our lack of sensitivity to the understanding of these issues.

I would go back to the experience of Spain a few years ago when the Spanish government came to power and withdrew its troops from Iraq. The Spanish government successfully disengaged from that conflict. That government carried on to solve some of its own internal insurgency issues. It has worked very hard to settle the problems it has in its own country.

There are other ways that we can approach the Afghanistan problem on an international basis. It does not take away the ability of a party to govern. That kind of a remark is simply inappropriate here. We are discussing a very difficult and serious situation that Canada has got itself into.

The two larger parties in Parliament have decided that they can settle their differences over a three year extension of this mission. We do not think that is appropriate. We have a solid position.

My question for my hon. colleague across the way is this. How does our party's position make us less informed, less able to conduct the business of the House, as one of his hon. members chose to point out?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I said when I started my comments that this was a very difficult position for me to articulate, having lost a member of my extended family in Afghanistan.

I also visited Afghanistan. I was not put in a military camp and restricted in my movements. I had the freedom to move and to talk with individual Afghans. I had no security.

I saw the difficulties the Afghan people were encountering. I saw what they wished for, an education for their children, a roof over their heads, probably a car and a better life tomorrow. We must engage the international community, especially NATO, so once we leave Afghanistan, someone else is there to take over from us.

We cannot say we are leaving right now. We cannot pack up our bags and say that the war is not going well and that we are not going to play any more. We have made a commitment. We have spent a lot of money. We have to give notice. Giving notice and saying that we need to change the engagement from peacemaking to peacekeepers is difficult because there are no two people to divide. We can say that in two years we will be gone, but we might leave some of the troops behind to do some work in aid. That is an excellent position for us to take. To say that we will leave right now is not a position we can take.

Government Orders

My hon. colleague talked about what happened when Spain left Iraq. Let me remind him what happened in Spain. A train was bombed. There was a change in the government and it said that it would move right away. That was not Afghanistan. That was Iraq.

Afghanistan is a totally different situation from Iraq. We are not in Iraq thanks to the Liberals.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to rise in the House today to participate in what I think is a very important debate, probably one of the most important debates that we are ever going to have in our Parliament, about whether or not we should be extending the mission in Afghanistan and whether or not we should be committing Canadian troops to that mission. I certainly appreciate being part of this debate.

I think it is really important as part of this debate that we be respectful of other points of view, because there is a variety of points of view in the House, in the Canadian public and in the country. I get a variety of feedback from the constituents in my riding, but overwhelmingly the feedback that I have heard is that people are very concerned about the continuing mission in Afghanistan.

The motion that we are debating tonight from the government, in collaboration with the Liberals, will basically see this mission continue to 2011. Although it is a very long motion that we are debating, the very key and operative part of that motion is: “therefore, it is the opinion of the House, that Canada should continue a military presence in Kandahar beyond February 2009, to July 2011”.

What we also are debating tonight is an amendment from the New Democratic Party, which has offered a different path and a different vision. It is a path that is based on building toward a peaceful resolution in Afghanistan, recognizing that this mission has not done what it said it would do, that it has not worked, and that therefore we need to take a different path.

The NDP amendment that we also are debating in this House reads as follows:

That the House call upon the government to begin preparations for the safe withdrawal of Canadian soldiers from the combat mission in Afghanistan with no further mission extensions;

that, in the opinion of the House, the government should engage in a robust diplomatic process to prepare the groundwork for a political solution, under explicit UN direction and authority, engaging both regional and local stakeholders, and ensuring the full respect for international human rights and humanitarian law;...

The NDP amendment goes much further, but I will certainly leave it at that in terms of the general tone of what we think we should be dealing with.

In debating these two different visions tonight, these two different paths, I did want to make a comment about what has been publicly stated by the chief of staff for the armed forces, General Hillier. I think we all read his various comments in the media, wherein he questioned whether this debate should take place, how long it would be, saying that somehow we were playing into the hands of the enemy, and that we should curtail this and we should be careful. I felt pretty offended by that. I felt those remarks were very out of place.

When I got elected to this House, and I think many members of Parliament feel this way—in fact, I hope we all feel this way—it was on the basis that we came here to have democratic debate, that we came here to represent our constituents, and that we came here to look at our global community as well as our Canadian community. We came here to take on important issues, to examine those issues, to weigh them up and to see what perspectives there were.

This debate, to me, is the very essence and core of what parliamentary democracy should be about. There is no more serious question than sending troops into combat. There is no more serious question than spending billions of dollars on a military mission, than the lives that are involved and the lives that have been lost. I think it is something that must be debated here in terms of public policy and what direction Canada takes.

• (2020)

I felt that the comments by the chief of staff for the armed forces were actually out of line and unacceptable and that we should have this debate. We should do it honourably and respectfully. We should do it from the point of view that we represent a Canadian interest in the international community. We should do it with a sense of our history, of who we are, and of the democratic values for peace-building, diplomacy and negotiation that I think Canadians want to see us move on.

I want to go back to where this began. I have heard from Conservative members today and on other days that the reason we are in Afghanistan is because this is about children going to school and women's equality. I find that a bit ironic given the stance that they take here at home in terms of women's equality and the cutbacks that we have suffered.

In fact, the Liberal member who spoke before me said that it was the Liberal government which ensured that Canada did not participate in the war in Iraq. That is correct, but that decision was made because of overwhelming public sentiment. There were demonstrations across the country of tens of thousands of people who said that Canada should not be participating in George Bush's war on terror and we should not be participating in the war on Iraq.

The prime minister of the day, Jean Chrétien, finally heard that message. I remember when we in the NDP were ridiculed for standing in the House and saying that we should not be participating in the war in Iraq, but finally the prime minister of the day made what I think was the proper decision and he was upheld by the Canadian people.

However, at the same time, another decision was made. That decision was to go into Afghanistan and support Operation Enduring Freedom, as it was known then, under the American military forces. It was clearly George Bush's war on terror. There was his famous line: “You're either with us or against us”. I remember when he made that statement to Congress and the American people. That goes back to 2001.

Government Orders

While on the one hand I think the right decision was made on the war on Iraq, on the other hand, Canada, with very little public debate, moved into its role of supporting in an indirect way the war on Iraq by moving its forces into Afghanistan when the bombing began. That was seven years and \$7 billion ago. Many lives have been lost since then.

Later we were told that the mission would end in 2003, but the Liberals extended it to 2006. Then we had a very key vote in Parliament, when the government, which was the right thing to do, at least put a motion forward in the House saying that it wanted to extend the mission until 2009. We could have ended the mission at that point if the Liberals had stuck together and voted the right way, but as we know, a number of Liberals voted with the government and so the extension happened.

Here we are today, now debating the fourth extension of this mission in Afghanistan, until 2011. As many people have said in the House on a number of occasions in the debates we have had, there is no certainty whatsoever, no guarantee or understanding from the government or anybody else, that it will be the last extension. The questions that we in the NDP had at the very beginning of this mission are still the questions we have today.

In fact, in terms of those questions and the analysis that has gone on, I particularly want to thank our NDP defence critic, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, who has done an incredible job in seeking information and accessing information under freedom of information legislation to find out exactly what the nature of this mission is and to try to get answers to some of those questions.

I thank the member for Halifax, who has been an incredible advocate for peace, development and women's rights globally and here at home, and has stood in the House and endured insults for daring to speak the truth about what is going on in this mission. I also thank the NDP foreign affairs critic, the member for Ottawa Centre.

I feel very proud to be a New Democrat. We have analyzed what we believe is going on. We have listened to our constituents and the discourse that is taking place both here in Canada and internationally, and we came to the conclusion, not on a partisan political basis but on the basis of public policy and the history of Canada's role in the international community, that this was indeed the wrong mission for Canada. As a result, we have our amendment tonight to seek the withdrawal in a safe manner of the combat mission.

● (2025)

There is much information that is now available about the mission, although I think more needs to come forward. In fact, I think even the government has acknowledged that the level of information has been very inadequate. This certainly was addressed by the Manley commission.

But we do know that the situation in Afghanistan is not getting better. It is getting worse. We do know that in December 2007 the UN calculated that in the previous nine months violent incidents in the south had risen by 30%, including over 5,000 local deaths.

I feel that is a great tragedy. It is a tragedy when Canadian soldiers die. It is a tragedy when civilians die and there is collateral damage, as it is called. In fact, I am sure we do not even know the full extent

of the civilian loss of life and the maiming that has taken place, the villages that have been bombed, and the insecurity that has come about as a result of this combat mission that is being put forward in the name of promoting democracy.

We know that in February 2008 Canadian Major-General Marc Lessard, NATO commander in the south, stated that violent incidents in the six southern provinces increased by 50% in 2007. We know again that in February 2008—and these are very recent pieces of information—NATO statistics revealed that insurgent attacks had climbed by 64% in the past year, from about 4,500 incidents in 2006 to approximately 7,400 incidents in 2007.

We also know that the same NATO statistics show that attacks on western and Afghan troops were up by almost a third in 2007, to more than 9,000 significant incidents, as they are called. That is a very dramatic increase.

Again, in January 2008, there were two independent reports from former NATO commanders in Afghanistan warning that the country risks becoming “a failed state”.

I have found it interesting that a lot of the analysis comes forward from military personnel who have been there. Upon leaving the scene and the environment, when they come back or retire or move on to another position, they actually begin to come forward with an analysis which shows that this mission is failing. I think we have seen that, whether it is from the British senior diplomat who is in Afghanistan, or whether it is from these former NATO commanders. There is now quite a list developing and the opinions are really beginning to stack up.

In the NDP, we are used to hearing the attacks on us from the Conservatives, who say that we do not know what we are talking about, but in actual fact, the conclusions we have come to have been arrived at by looking at what is actually taking place, and by looking at the analysis being provided by some of these military experts, by NGOs and by United Nations organizations.

I also want to briefly talk about another issue that I think has been put forward in this debate, which is that the reason we are in Afghanistan is to protect women and to bring to the country women's equality. I think that again we have to search very deeply and to be truthful as to whether or not that is actually taking place.

I would point out to the House that in October 2006 a report by Womankind Worldwide, entitled “Taking Stock Update: Afghan Women and Girls Five Years On”, concluded that the lives of Afghan women have not changed very much. In fact, violence against women is still endemic. The number of women attempting to commit suicide by self-immolation has risen dramatically. The majority of marriages are still forced. In the middle eastern portion of the country, where the Taliban never had control, a woman dies in childbirth every 20 minutes.

● (2030)

In August 2007 an internal government analysis that was leaked to *La Presse* contradicted the picture that was painted by the Conservative government. Attacks on schools, for example, were actually increasing across the country. There were more attacks in the first half of 2006 than there were in the whole of 2005.

Government Orders

The justice system there is very fragile. A very clear benchmark of democratic practice and democratic principles is the stability of a justice system. That is struggling in that country.

We know from the debates and the questions we have had in the House that opinions on the whole issue of the transfer of detainees is, at the least, divided. At the worst, court challenges are going on even now to try and stop Canada from continuing the transfer of detainees because of significant concern about the violation of basic human rights.

In January 2007 Rina Amiri from the UN painted a very bleak picture of women's lives that impacted our own parliamentary defence committee. She said that forced marriages, honour killings, extreme poverty, and virtual slavery were commonplace.

I want to quote from a very brave parliamentarian who was at our convention in Quebec City. Malalai Joya has travelled across Canada. She is a courageous young woman. She was elected to the Afghani parliament. She was removed from the parliament for daring to speak out about the fact that warlords and criminals were still in charge. She has now been expelled from the Afghanistan parliament.

Malalai Joya said in 2006, "When the entire nation is living under the shadow of gun and warlordism, how can its women enjoy very basic freedoms?" Contrary to "the propaganda raised by certain western media, Afghan women and men are not 'liberated' at all".

We hosted her in our community when she came to Vancouver just a few months ago. She spoke at our anti-war rallies and our peace rallies. It was remarkable to hear this young woman who has endured death threats for daring to speak out.

As members of Parliament, we sometimes say things that are not very popular. Sometimes we rise in this House and we express minority opinions. We do so because we believe it is the right thing to do. I do not think any of us has endured a death threat and we have not been expelled for daring to express our opinions, even if they are unpopular and even if they are in the minority.

Unfortunately, Malalai Joya has been expelled and she has had to deal with those kinds of death threats to herself and her family because she spoke out with a different point of view. For me, that really speaks to the conflict and the crisis that is taking place in that country.

The mission in Afghanistan is now costing the Canadian public more than \$100 million per month. We have to ask two serious questions: What is the rationale for the cost of this mission? What is the produced outcome in terms of either a stable government or a stable country?

I take exception to the line from the Conservatives. I guess some people believe that we are in Afghanistan because we are somehow defending democracy there. I believe the reason we are there is that we were led into this on a political basis to support the war on terror. It had nothing to do with women's rights or democracy. It had to do with political, strategic reasons in that region and for the Canadian government at the time. We have seen an escalation of that course now.

It is very disturbing that we lost the opportunity we had in this House to say that we wanted to see this combat mission end. It was lost because the Liberals have now moved over and supported the Conservative position. That is very regrettable. I think it was done for political reasons. I believe that months and even years from now people will look back and ask: Why did this mission go on for so long? Why did Canada play that role? Why did Canada not choose the path to peace?

● (2035)

I want to end by quoting what our leader said when he spoke at the University of Ottawa:

I believe that Canada can and should be a voice of moderation, realism and peace on the world stage.

And to become that voice, we must embrace a new approach for Canada as well for the international community.

That is why we put forward our amendment. That is why we will not be supporting the government-Liberal motion. That is why we will continue to be very firm in our position that this is the wrong mission and we should be withdrawing our troops in a safe way. We should be taking that other path, a path that leads to peace and stability for the people of Afghanistan.

● (2040)

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, about the only thing the hon. member said with which I would agree with her is that originally when we went there it was because of our desire to do our part to fight terrorism. That is about all I think I would agree with in her entire statement.

The member did talk about the NDP amendment to the motion. That is what we are currently debating. I want to read a little from it and then ask her a question about it. It goes on at quite some length. I do not want to read the entire amendment, but it states:

...that, in the opinion of the House, the government should engage in a robust diplomatic process to prepare the groundwork for a political solution—

—whatever that is, and further on it states:

—and ensuring the full respect for international human rights and humanitarian law;

I wonder if the member could explain how we could accomplish that, ensure the full respect for international human rights and humanitarian law, without the troops on the ground there to assist in actually ensuring that. The motion then goes on:

...that, in the opinion of the House, the government should maintain the current suspension on the transfer of Afghan detainees to Afghan authorities until substantial reforms of the prison system are undertaken;

It does not say how long that might take. I would be interested in knowing, since it seems to be the NDP's desire to extend a temporary suspension of holding those detainees to a more permanent role if it is suggesting that we somehow build prisons. I suppose they are not, since we would remove our troops from providing any security and therefore they obviously would not be in a position to take any more detainees or Afghan prisoners, as I would call them.

Then lastly, the motion states:

...that, in the opinion of the House, the government should provide effective and transparent development assistance under civilian direction...

Government Orders

This is something that continues to puzzle me about the naivety of the NDP position. How in God's name do the NDP members figure that we or anyone else, including the Afghans themselves, would be in a position to provide effective and transparent development assistance under civilian direction as long as the Taliban are there to destroy everything and blow people up with their mines and their IEDs? How, if we removed our troops, would we ever get any civilians, foreign or local, domestic civilians, to try to extend development assistance without the troops there to provide some semblance of security?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am not really surprised that the government whip does not agree with my position. I do not think that is a surprise to anybody here. I know that he has very strong views and he wholeheartedly supports what his government is doing. I was glad to hear that at least we agree on one point, so that is some progress, is it not?

In terms of our amendment, it is really how we approach this whole question. What I feel, and I think all of us in the NDP feel, is that all of the resources and the political resources, the weight of the government, is earmarked toward this military mission and very little thought has been given to engaging, to quote from our amendment, "in a robust diplomatic process to prepare the groundwork for a political solution" within international law and upholding international human rights.

I think it is all about where one is coming from. If one is wedded to the idea that it is a military mission that is going to solve it, then everything else becomes exclusionary. We in the NDP believe there is a different path. If Canada played a different role within NATO, within the international community, within the United Nations, and we worked as a positive force in terms of laying that groundwork, then we would begin to see that solution. If we do not try, it will never happen. That is the reality.

I do know for example that the Dutch have taken a very different approach, even in terms of their combat mission. We have hardly debated that in this House.

Even in terms of military combat, there are different kinds of approaches to take in terms of how we engage civilians, how we work in the local villages in Afghanistan. Even within that debate, there are very different perspectives within NATO.

To answer the member's question, we believe that the approach taken by the Canadian government from the beginning has been so weighted toward a combat mission. We can see that by the money being spent. I think for every \$12 spent on the military mission only \$1 is being spent on reconstruction. If it were the other way around, or if it were focused on a development process and a peace process, I think we would begin to see a different reaction. If Canada used its goodwill and standing in the international community to do that, I think we would have very strong support here in Canada and we would be able to garner the support of other countries to do that as well.

• (2045)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to get to a question, but first I want to say that if the hon. member is going to

trash the chief of the defence staff, she should at least pronounce his name correctly. It is Hillier.

In fact, General Hillier has about 100,000 Canadian families who expect him to look after the safety of their kids. He did not say there should not be a debate. He did say it should happen quickly and there should be clarity given to Canadians, given to the troops and given to the Taliban. His comments were in fact entirely proper and within his mandate.

There is one other little point. Nobody has talked about Afghanistan being a military solution only. Nobody has talked about that. A couple of people have raised World War II. I will point out to the hon. member that World War II was not solved by negotiation in any way, shape or form. World War II was ended purely because of military strength.

People talked about the NDP forming government. If the NDP had been in government, perhaps the Dutch would still be eating tulip bulbs. Certainly South Korea would be enjoying the same communist poverty as North Korea if that were the case.

I would just ask my hon. colleague, is there anything that the NDP members think is worth fighting for?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing to hear that kind of commentary from the parliamentary secretary.

To question what the Chief of Staff of the Canadian Forces says and to have that characterized as trashing, I guess the Conservatives cannot stand to have any other opinion. It becomes monolithic in terms of what they stand for. I feel that this is unfortunate because we have a parliamentary secretary who is meant to play a greater role.

I am sorry if my accent does not pronounce his name correctly but that is the way it is and it is with no disrespect to him. However, I believe I have a right to question what the Chief of Staff says and I believe he went over the line in the political arena in beginning to debate what we should be debating here.

The Chief of Staff is to carry out the decisions that are made by Parliament and by the Government of Canada. Our debate is here, and I believe that strongly. If I did not believe that I would not be here. I take great exception to what the parliamentary secretary said. Canada is not run by the military. Canada is run by a democratically elected government, based on decisions that are made in a democratic forum in this House.

In terms of what the NDP is willing to fight for, that is a rhetorical question. We should be having a serious discussion here. If the member wants to look at the history of the CCF and the NDP, then I do not think he will find a party that has a stronger record for standing up for people's rights, for peace and for going to war when that was necessary. That does not mean to say that we agree with this mission.

To say that it is all or nothing makes this some intimidation kind of debate. I would have expected more from the parliamentary secretary.

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My comments were made from a serious perspective that does not happen to agree with his but, as far as I am concerned, that is fine. I respect his opinion. However, when we hear that kind of a response from the Conservatives it only digs them in deeper to a position that is not shared by a growing number of Canadians.

Part of this debate is actually having a reality check and hearing what our constituents are saying. I certainly know from the responses that I get that even if people supported this mission at the beginning, they now wonder where it will go. Canadians do not believe that 2011 will be the end of this mission. They do not believe that this motion that has come forth from the Liberals and the Conservatives, called this pan-Canadian motion, is anything that is supportable.

It is for that reason that we put forward the amendment and we have taken a different point of view.

• (2050)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing.

I am pleased that we are actually having a debate this time around because the last time we dealt with the issue of extending the mission we really did not have much of a debate. Most members were unable to—

Hon. Jay Hill: How about the debate we had when the Liberals were in office.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: There are only a few of them in the House but I remember the member used to be a member of the Reform Party and they came to Ottawa to do things differently and one of the things they were going to do is not heckle. I would really appreciate if the member would remember his roots.

It is good that we are having this debate and most members who want to speak are able to speak. There is no question that we have many viewpoints coming forward and different parties are presenting different viewpoints.

Before I get into the debate, it is important for all of us to realize the very heavy toll that is being borne by our engagement in Afghanistan. Seventy-nine soldiers have been killed, along with a diplomat and thousands of people in Afghanistan who became casualties of this war, civilians I might add. It is a very difficult situation on the ground in Afghanistan.

I recall meeting with a mujahedeen in the eighties in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo. That gentleman was involved in fighting against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. I mention that because it is very important that, as we try to help the Afghans establish a civil society, we recognize that it is a country that has undergone a great deal of hardship and occupation. It is also important that we, as part of a NATO force, be seen as people who are facilitating the Afghan people in establishing a civil society.

The soldiers who paid the supreme sacrifice carried out the mission that we as members of Parliament and the government of the day set for them. Let there be no question that every member of this House supports our soldiers. Whether we agree or disagree with the mission, we all support the soldiers. In recognizing their sacrifices, it is important that we honour their service at the point in time where

we might have casualty, as was very strongly suggested by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, by commemorating the occasion by lowering the flag in the morning and having a moment of silence in the House. It is something that the previous government did.

That is important because we as Canadians mourned with those troops and mourned with their families. There is no question that it should not be a situation where we try to keep the public away from the repatriation of the bodies, which thankfully was changed. The price we pay for having this engagement should not be downplayed.

When we talk about issues related to how we deal with detainees in Afghanistan, we need to recognize that while we are there to establish a civil society and set in place institutions, it is important to deal with human rights and with detainees.

• (2055)

When one supports an internationally accepted norm for dealing with detainees, it is important that the international norm be observed. However, it should not be used to say that one is supporting the Taliban instead of our soldiers, because let us be very clear that there is nobody in this House who does not support our troops.

I listened to the comments earlier on by the member of the Conservative Party, the caucus chair. He talked about his experiences in Uganda under Idi Amin. He talked about how thousands of Asians who settled in Uganda were uprooted because of their race and ended up being expelled. He mentioned that he was still a baby when he was a refugee coming from Uganda. He talked about the price paid by the people who were expelled and who were ostracized in that country.

Canada took his family in, as Canada has taken in many families. He mentioned how important it was, how he looks at Uganda now and how he very much appreciates the evolution that has been taking place.

Many people know my situation. Fifty-one years ago, I came here as a refugee after the Hungarian revolution. On October 23 of last year I returned there with a parliamentary delegation led by the now defence minister who was the foreign affairs minister at the time.

I recall vividly the revolution in November 1956 when the Soviet tanks came back into Hungary, having withdrawn at an initial stage, and the prime minister of the time, Imre Nagi, asking for help and the call going unheeded. It resulted in 200,000 Hungarians fleeing Hungary. It occurred to me at the 50th anniversary, as all the members of NATO and people from around the world were there, that they came 50 years late.

I was very pleased to see the developments in Hungary and eastern Europe and the democratization. However, the reality is we are no longer caught in the cold war as we were before. It is not a question of either side controlling client states. The situation we are in now is we will have failed states. Afghanistan was a failed state. There are a number of other failed states such as Darfur and Zimbabwe that we in the international community need to pay attention to.

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Our legitimacy in Afghanistan and trying to establish civil society is not just doing something for those people over there. It is the world coming together collectively under the United Nations umbrella, in this case NATO. What we are doing is trying to deal with a failed state because it is going to deal with the security of the whole world. We need to get used to the idea that we will need to go into failed states and do these kinds of activities.

The biggest problem I have had with the Afghan mission is that Canada cannot be doing the heavy lifting forever. We are caught up in Kandahar and our casualty rate is higher than anybody else's casualty rate. Now that we have a clearer timeline on rotating out, I think it is great. It is something we can all support. The fact that we will be putting more emphasis on diplomacy and development is also very good. I would venture to say that all members of the House agree that we should put more emphasis on development and diplomacy.

As I talk about the world community and how collectively we will need to ensure each other's security, it is important to mention that collectively we will need to try to bear some influence on the United States to ensure it does not go off and undertake unilateral missions, as it did in the case of Iraq.

• (2100)

That mission has really undercut us, the United States and the rest of the world in dealing with Afghanistan. There is no question now in the United States that the war as turned out to be very unpopular. It is not fulfilling the mission that it was set up to fulfill. All the Democratic candidates have said that they will take the troops out of Iraq. The debate now is how quickly they will do it.

The lesson learned is we have to ensure that when we operate in the international forum and when we deal with failed states and try to bring them into the family of democracy, we do it under the umbrella of the United Nations and in alliances, not in unilateral missions.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member and I know about his background as a refugee from Hungary, on which he just elaborated on, and the failure of the international community to react when tanks moved into Hungary. My colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona talked about coming to Canada as a refugee.

When we have failed states, it is very important that the international community take action. Where it has taken collective action, we have seen some positive results. South Korea is one of the greatest examples where the Korean ambassador appealed to the UN. The UN responded and Canada, as part of the allies, took part in the international effort.

We lost 587 soldiers in Korea. I was at the memorial in South Korea for the 587 Canadians who lost their lives. When I visited the tunnels and the demilitarized zone, all the people thanked Canada for giving them freedom because they could see a very clear difference.

The NDP has put forward an amendment saying that the UN should take the peacemaking process and be involved in this. I am sure my colleague will answer this. Is this not a UN mission?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the parliamentary secretary that we have a NATO mission, with Canada under the

umbrella of the United Nations. Canada wanted to bring NATO in specifically because of the rotation issue. They are supposed to rotate out. Troops do their tours of duty under NATO within that mission and after a certain period of time get rotated out.

It is unfortunate that all NATO members are not bearing the same burden as we are. We are into the hottest part of Afghanistan and the casualty rate for the number of soldiers involved is high. I look forward to the rotation out.

Getting back to the point of failed states, that is the biggest strength we have on this planet right now. It is very clear that we have to do it under the auspices of the United Nations, but if we can get the NATO alliance in there, as we have in this case because we had the capacity to respond, that is a good thing.

We also have to ensure the UN has the capacity to keep dealing with the failed states. There are a number of failed states in Africa and it is very conducive and helpful to have people from the continent partaking in the UN missions.

• (2105)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned the word "rotation" quite frequently when he speaks. Other speakers in the House have talked about the importance of standing behind the people to whom we have made a commitment, the families, the women, the children and the people of the Kandahar region.

When talking about rotation, one is implicitly saying that at some point there was an agreement that we would leave and somebody else would come in so they would not be abandoned. Because the member has not spoken about it, perhaps he could provide some details as to what the agreement was on rotation when the former government committed us to Kandahar in the first place. I have never seen any document and I doubt the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence has ever seen one.

He talked about the undue burden that we have carried. If the former government were going to commit them to this burden, where is the document that talks about rotation?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, originally when we went there, we saw the tour of duty being about a year. It was very clear at the time. The Chief of Defence Staff, who was just being appointed, assured us that before we agreed to the mission that we would have the capacity to do other missions around the world as well, such as Darfur.

All members in the House are getting calls from members of their constituencies saying that we need to take a leadership role in Darfur. Obviously we cannot because we are stuck in Afghanistan, which is not a very satisfactory situation.

The fact is the Kandahar region is the hottest spot in Afghanistan. That is why the government now is agreeing to get extra help from other countries going there. We are not going to stay in the highest casualty spot forever. It takes away from our ability to do the kind of reconstruction and the kind of diplomacy we want to do. It also takes away from our capacity to do other missions.

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Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join the debate tonight, a debate that honours our troops in Afghanistan and everywhere they act on behalf of Canada in the world, and indeed domestically.

I echo the comments of my colleague from Waterloo. To have this debate and to recognize there are different points of view and at the same time to recognize that in this democracy debate is necessary is a good irony. It is good that we can have the debate in this place. We could wish that other countries like Afghanistan could enjoy the ability to have discussions like this without guns, bombs, bullets or treachery. We and our troops, men and women, are there on our behalf to advance those values that we hold as a nation.

There is not a member in the House who does not, regardless of his or her view, support our troops. I want to emphasize that is my view and the view of all of us here.

In so doing, I want to pay tribute to those soldiers, men and women of the military, who have lost their lives, about 80, and the many hundreds who have been wounded to one degree or another.

I am the vice-chair of the veterans affairs committee, which is doing a study of veterans benefits. We are seeing all too often in testimony the tragic impact on lives of post-traumatic stress disorder. There is no question that the operation in Afghanistan will produce, unfortunately, a goodly share of future veterans of today's serving military who will suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. However, that is the price of acting out the values of our democracy in foreign lands.

I also submit that the motion, to give credit to the Prime Minister and the Liberal leader, is the result of their efforts to find common ground that reflects the values of our country and that it is a Canadian motion, not a Conservative or a Liberal motion.

I have talked to previous NDP voters who are much happier with this balanced approach than with the approach that Canada should leave Afghanistan right away.

I represent the riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing. A major part of my current riding was represented by the late Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson. It was 50 years ago last fall that he won the Nobel Prize for his efforts in the area of peacekeeping.

We do not use the word "peacekeeping" very much any more, but ultimately it is all about that. Whether we go through seasons when that word does not easily fit the circumstances, there would be few Canadians who would not agree that it is really what ultimately we are trying to achieve.

I know all too well the families of soldiers killed. They are from the little communities of McKerrow and Espanola in my riding. Two young men lost their lives in Afghanistan in the last couple of years. They know too well that there is a great sacrifice.

By the lack of emails, phone calls and letters from constituents telling me that this motion is a mistake, I have a sense, and I am sure most of my colleagues here have this sense as well, that we are doing the right thing.

We will have an election sooner or later and that election will rightfully be about differing views on the country's finances, child

care, aboriginal concerns and so on. However, it should not be about Afghanistan. We have troops there and families at home are wishing them Godspeed in their time there and their journey home. I think we are doing the right thing by settling this matter.

Our troops want us to debate this. Ultimately they want clear direction from the Parliament of Canada. As our leader has said, it is not our job as parliamentarians to micromanage the work of the generals and their fellow leaders on the ground. That is not our role. Our role is to set the direction and the mandate.

• (2110)

To go back to our veterans affairs committee, we recently visited four military bases, from the west to the east of Canada, in our veterans health study. In my experience, not a single member of the military questioned the debate, not a single one. They understand that the war has passed and that as for the work of our veterans, whether it was in the first or second world wars, in Korea or elsewhere in peacekeeping, those efforts were in fact to preserve and promote democracy. It is an honour. We honour our military by having this debate.

Let me go specifically to the things that our party wanted to see as the Afghanistan mission moved forward. We knew that there would have to be change in the mission. We knew that there would have to be an end date.

We also felt strongly that we would have to move beyond the military engagement, at least as the military engagement presents itself to us right now. The military engagement should focus on training the security forces and providing security for development and the building of infrastructure, schools and so on. For this, it is understandable.

Canadians understand that we need a strong military to be in that village once it is secured to make sure that it is safe for the water system to be built or rebuilt, as the case might be, or for that school to be built, and for other important issues of local governments to be fostered.

We need a strong military. As for how the devolution or the evolution of the combat mission unfolds in the months ahead, we will leave that to our military leaders. They have our message that the counter-insurgency measures should be diminished and that the military role of combat where necessary is in support of securing the reconstruction and securing development. We understand that it is our military that will decide those issues.

It was also very important to us that the issue of detainee transfers be dealt with. Happily, there is at least some clearing of the air on that important issue.

Also, we are calling on NATO to step up. There are other member states of NATO that need to take more responsibility. It is not our role as Canadians to be there forever doing the work that others should be sharing with us. Canadians understand that, but at the same time, they do not want to see us leaving Afghanistan tomorrow.

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I feel very strongly that ultimately we are helping to build a civil society there. It seems a long way off when we look at the terrible news that emanates from that country and that region on almost a daily basis, but we cannot lose hope. We cannot lose faith that people, individuals, families, and communities, ultimately want to live in peace. We cannot work out their differences that may exist from ages past in their communities. They have to work those things out themselves.

It is not our role to change people or to tell people what they should do in their communities. However, we can provide leadership by good example. We can demonstrate by good example the fruits that come from labouring together to have a country such as we do, where debate is in a chamber like this, where debate does not involve bullets and bombs. Sometimes it involves strong emotional debate, but ultimately it is a debate of words settled by a democratic vote.

Much has been and should be made of the place of women in Afghanistan. Just having celebrated International Women's Day in Canada, I think it is important to remind ourselves that while we have some ways to go in our own country in this regard, we are light years ahead, sadly, of countries like Afghanistan.

Again, however, the cultural mores of another country are not ours to change. Those will change over time. Again, we will provide leadership by example. We will provide the security that will allow for the fostering of more equality and women's rights, and rights for minorities not only in Afghanistan but right around the world.

● (2115)

Afghanistan presents a very complicated situation today, as it has for decades and generations, sadly.

We support our troops. We look forward to them coming home safely when the mission finally reaches its end.

I think Parliament is working. I want to commend this place for helping us achieve a remarkable consensus as we move forward.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Liberal member opposite about his opinions on how as a NATO coalition, a UN sanctioned mission in Afghanistan, we can deal with the challenges in Kandahar province, along some of the border area with Pakistan and with some of the other provinces in southern Afghanistan that border the state of Pakistan.

As the member might know, the Durand line was a line that Sir Mortimer Durand, in the late nineteenth century, set on a map to demarcate the line between Afghanistan and British India, which now has become the Pakistani-Afghani border. This line was an effort on the part of the governments of the day to try to impose nation-state constructs on what then was essentially a tribal area and is at present a tribal area.

What ideas or solutions does the member opposite suggest that could be implemented to ensure that the nation-state constructs of Afghanistan and Pakistan have sovereignty over this area? Does he believe that we can arrive at that end or does he believe that we cannot? In other words, does he believe that it may not be possible for the nation-states of Pakistan and Afghanistan to effect their sovereignty over what is essentially the Pashtun tribal area?

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for his very detailed question. Obviously he is a student of history. I commend him for that. I do not know whether I can satisfy his question in any great detail, but what he made me think of as he was asking his question was the age-old problem in Northern Ireland, which, in another context, we might ask, was it tribal or was it not tribal?

As for dealing with tribal issues in parts of the world where the history is unique, each situation is unique and complex, and I do not think it is the place of a western nation like Canada to be picking winners and losers. Lines are often arbitrary lines between states. They are often chosen by the outgoing military leader of the day or some far-off governor appointed from some far-off country.

With respect to Pakistan, I think our leader has said it very well. He was criticized for it, but I think he said it very well when he said that there needs to be a greater emphasis on diplomacy, and I am glad to see that in this motion. I think the Pakistan puzzle in all of this needs a lot more attention. Hopefully, with the election of a coalition government in Pakistan now, we will see some settling down of the political problems there and greater attention and energy on the border.

However, when it comes to tribal and internecine fighting, I think those mysteries will remain mysteries for the western world for a long time to come. All we can do is provide some security within their paradigm, whereby hopefully they can work things out, as we have seen slowly happening in Northern Ireland. I hope that gives the member some sense of an answer to his very good question.

● (2120)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Avalon.

It is my honour to speak on this motion regarding our future military and development involvement in Afghanistan. Before I begin, I want to congratulate our Prime Minister, Mr. Harper, on the work he has done with the opposition—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member knows that we should not refer to the Prime Minister by name.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to congratulate the Prime Minister on his work with the opposition parties to come up with a motion that hopefully can be accepted by the vast majority of this House.

We all know about the troubled history that the country of Afghanistan has experienced and the Afghan people have endured. After decades of war and oppression, Afghanistan now is a burgeoning democracy. Many successes have been achieved since the UN mandated and NATO led mission was deployed to Afghanistan at the request of the Government of Afghanistan.

One of the areas of success has been democracy and governance. Afghanistan has had a long history of difficulties, being located at the crossroads of central, west and south Asia. That is why, on October 9, 2004, Afghanistan's first national democratic presidential election was so important to the future of the country.

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On that day, more than eight million Afghans voted. After having had virtually no rights only a few years earlier, women made up 41% of these voters. On November 3, Hamid Karzai was announced as the winner. On December 7, he was inaugurated as Afghanistan's first democratically elected president. In naming his cabinet, President Karzai appointed three women as ministers.

In 2005, the Afghan people, in a national vote, elected their 249-seat lower house, the House of People. As well, the 102-seat House of Elders was elected by the 34 provincial councils. All of this would have been unheard of only a short time earlier, yet the people of Afghanistan, with the help of their international allies, now have a democratically elected national government. During this time, Afghanistan has had the largest refugee repatriation of any country in the world over the last 30 years.

Canada and its allies are working with the Afghan government and the provincial councils on rebuilding the country's infrastructure. A safe and secure environment is critical for the development and reconstruction to take place and to help the Afghans build the foundations for stability.

The country now has 167 district development agencies and over 19,000 community development councils, elected to prioritize infrastructure projects. Of the more than 33,000 local infrastructure projects approved nationwide, more than 16,000 have been completed.

In the province of Kandahar, where Canada heads the provincial reconstruction team, there are more than 530 elected councils and more than 630 projects completed. Canadians have helped build more than 1,200 wells, 80 reservoirs, 500 culverts and 150 kilometres of irrigation systems and canals.

Many kilometres of rural roads have been upgraded, along with road-paving projects on key high traffic routes. The roads are essential for the transportation of goods, especially for Afghan farmers. None of these projects would have been possible without the province being able to maintain security.

Another important area of development is the justice system. Canada is helping to reform the Afghan justice system to promote human rights and to allow better protection of its citizens.

Our country provided training for prosecutors, public defenders, court administrators and legal aid programming, as well as more than 200 judges, including women, and those who will train others to be judges.

Canada is also working to strengthen the Afghan national police so that the Government of Afghanistan can effectively police its own population and bring law and order back to the country, which is sorely needed so that people can feel safe in their own communities.

Canada has been investing in police reform through an approach that includes mentoring, training, funding of salaries, providing equipment and uniforms, and building police facilities.

• (2125)

In Kandahar province alone, Canada has trained more than 475 members of the Afghan national police. Canada has contributed

nearly \$13 million to a law and order trust fund which helps pay the salaries of the Afghan national police.

All of this assistance to the government of Afghanistan is aimed at building its ability to govern and to leave Afghanistan to Afghans.

As we have helped their country remain secure and governance is developing, Afghanistan has been able to take its rightful place in the international community. Repeated efforts by the Taliban to occupy the Afghanistan seat at the United Nations were unsuccessful. However, now the Afghan people are represented at the UN and around the world.

Afghanistan now enjoys diplomatic relations with dozens and dozens of other countries and has signed a good neighbour declaration with six nations that border Afghanistan to respect its independence and territory. As we help to rebuild the Afghan government and its institutions, Afghanistan will become more and more self-sufficient.

All of these achievements can only come about in a secure environment.

I want to talk about three personal experiences I have had. I have not had the opportunity to go to Afghanistan, but last summer I had the opportunity to go to Alberta for about five or six days to the training centre that this country has for those who are going to serve our country proudly in Afghanistan.

I was very impressed by the facilities that we have for the fine men and women who are going to risk their lives on behalf of our country and Afghans. I was also very impressed with the people I was with there. They were reservists training, wanting to go to Afghanistan, wanting to make a difference in their country and wanting to represent Canada in a very difficult spot. It was an honour for me to be there. It was an opportunity for me to learn while talking to those individuals what was important to them and why they wanted to serve.

Another thing which reinforced my commitment to support the motion for us to continue our work in Afghanistan until 2011 is that we had a red Friday event in my riding, which was a very large rally supporting our troops at our city hall. Some veterans who had been there and had come back spoke to us about the work that is being done on the ground in Afghanistan and why it was important for us to continue our efforts there.

It was a very moving experience for me. The overwhelming desire at the very large rally was that we need to continue to play the role Canada has traditionally played in our history in development, in providing safety and security for others around the world. I was very honoured to be a guest at that rally.

The second last thing I would like to speak about is when I visited the reservists from my riding who were going to Afghanistan. I talked to them about why they were going. I was pretty new in my term as a member of Parliament and it was very moving for me and a very difficult thing for me. I was not sure what to say to them other than to thank them. I thanked each and every one who was going there to serve.

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Finally, the hardest vote I have had to make was the vote to extend the mission which we had a couple of years ago. I can say now, based on my experience and my understanding of what we are doing there that I am much more comfortable voting, this week hopefully, on this motion supporting our efforts in Afghanistan. To this end, I will continue to stand up for our soldiers, our development workers, our diplomats and aid workers as they continue to do this very important work on behalf of Canada in Afghanistan.

• (2130)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague with a great deal of interest. I find him to be a very logical and amenable person in most of his parliamentary duties.

When we look at what is happening in Afghanistan, the Conservatives and Liberals are forming a coalition on an extension of the conflict for three years with a very definitive end date. That end date is not attached to a success date or a successful point in Afghanistan's development. We see it simply as an end point. We are debating a motion that will extend our involvement in Afghanistan to 2011. Our soldiers will continue to be engaged in active combat, where their lives are in danger, but there is no understanding of the end point being a success point.

We have moved from the Conservatives having an open-ended approach where we were going to be there until we were successful to the Liberals wanting us to get out a little bit earlier. How does this logically follow that now we have an end date of 2011 and we are asking our soldiers to remain there regardless of the successful outcome of the mission?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I do not look at the end date that is in the motion as a success date, as the member put it. We are successful every day that we are there. Our diplomatic efforts, our development efforts and our military efforts are making a difference on the ground for the men and women and the young people of Afghanistan every single day.

If we took the New Democratic approach and left tomorrow, all the work done and the sacrifices made by our men and women on behalf of Canada in Afghanistan would be or naught.

We need to stay there. We have put a date in the motion because we must let Canadians know when there will be a rotation and when we are leaving. We have put a date there. That does not mean that is the date when we will be successful. We are trying to make a difference and we are successfully making a difference every single day that we are in Afghanistan.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, it is not often that I have the privilege to ask a supplementary question during debate.

Once again I go to the logic of the position that the hon. member is putting forward that we do not have a success date. We are locking in our soldiers to be engaged in Afghanistan for three more years without a measurement of success, without an understanding.

I think our position in all ways is more defensible. We are saying that the mission is not succeeding and that we need to change the mission. In order to change the mission we need to withdraw from the effort that we are engaged in now in southern Afghanistan and put forward a new approach from Canada.

How does it work to keep our soldiers in Afghanistan for three more years without understanding what success there will be?

• (2135)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Two years.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary reminded me that it is an additional two years, not three years as the member who asked the question indicated.

This motion is about the evolution of the mission. It is about seeing what our men and women have accomplished thus far, from a military point of view in terms of security and safety and a development point of view in terms of providing schools, wells, all those things that add to the quality of life for Afghans. We are working on those issues. This motion is about that evolution, about where we are headed next. That is why we are here today debating the motion. That is why we had a debate last week and why we will have some more debate. Then we will vote on it.

If we read the motion, it is about how the mission has changed and how it continues to evolve and how it has improved the lives of those who live in Afghanistan.

Again I want to thank all the men and women who have made the sacrifice of leaving their families and giving their lives. Their commitment has been overwhelming for me as a member of Parliament. I want to thank them once more.

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today to further contribute to the debate on this important issue and the motion before the House. I am very proud to speak to this motion, a truly Canadian motion.

This motion would extend our mission to 2011, increase the capacity of the ISAF, and better equip our soldiers. It is not a Liberal or a Conservative motion, but a motion to move forward and succeed in a tough and challenging mission.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate our Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence for doing a wonderful job in ensuring that Canadians are playing an important role in that part of the world.

As a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate General Rick Hillier. We are very proud of the general in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are proud of the leadership he has shown not only in this mission, but indeed with the Canadian armed forces.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians comprise approximately 1.5% of the population of this great country. We are proud that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, young men and women of our province, contribute to almost 10% of the Canadian armed forces.

I feel it necessary to go back to the basics in my remarks today and remind the House of the fundamental reasons that we are involved in Afghanistan and the benefits of such involvement.

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As the Manley report states, “events in Afghanistan, and Canada's participation in the outcomes, will directly affect Canada's security”. This is one of the most important reasons that we are there and we must support this mission so we can finish the job. Let everybody be aware that our soldiers, our men and women, are making a difference. I would like to remind people of the difference we are making.

In 2001, 700,000 children were in school in Afghanistan and they were all boys. The Taliban regime did not allow education for little girls. Today, just a mere six years afterward, more than six million children are enrolled in school in Afghanistan this year, one-third of them little girls. Just that statistic alone shows us that our Canadian mission and our soldiers are making a difference in Afghanistan.

We take a lot of things for granted in this country. As the father of a five year old daughter who just started kindergarten last September, I shudder to think that I could live in a country where somebody would tell me as a father that my daughter was not allowed to go to school to learn about not only her own country, but the world.

I believe that to some extent this House, and perhaps some Canadians, have forgotten the core reason that we are involved in Afghanistan. We forget that the events of September 11, 2001 were the catalyst of our involvement there. Ask any Canadian if they can remember where they were on September 11, 2001. It is one of those days in our history when everybody knows full well where they were at the specific moment they found out about the attacks on America.

We lose sight of the fact that it was from Afghanistan that al-Qaeda leaders planned and directed the terrorist attacks of that day. Canada's role as a member of the United Nations and NATO led to our involvement in Afghanistan. The UN Security Council acknowledged the right of individual and collective self-defence, and we participated in the efforts to bring justice and stability to a formerly unstable and unjust country.

We know that this conflict is justified and beneficial. Why would we then abandon the cause? Why would we jeopardize international, Canadian and Afghan security by withdrawing from the mission before the job was done?

● (2140)

We know that the job is not done. We know that the insurgents that Canadians, alongside Afghans, are so bravely fighting are the same people that received safe haven from the Taliban government of Afghanistan prior to the days of September 11. We know that almost certainly they will receive the same safe haven if the Taliban were allowed to regain power. We know that if we give up now, the Taliban would seek to return and bring back their brutal regime.

Great progress has been made on the ground with the Afghan army and police and there is still more training to be done. We have seen a steady rise in the numbers enrolled in the Afghan national army. Since transferring control to these forces is the ultimate goal, we must make sure they are properly prepared. With a greater focus on training the Afghan army, we will be working ourselves out of a job and that is our goal, to leave Afghanistan to the Afghans.

Our colleagues from the NDP have proposed to remove our troops completely and abandon the people of Afghanistan. However, this is

a reality denying proposition. We must wonder about the sincerity and commitment of the NDP to its own principles.

Internationally, almost every social democratic party in the western world supports our mission in Afghanistan, such as the labour parties in the U.K. and Australia, or the social democrats in Germany. Yet, what can only be described as a cheap shot for votes, the NDP has forsaken its own principles for an easy isolationism that appeals to the worst of our natures, the selfish and easy way out.

One wonders whatever happened to solidarity. There is no easy way out of Afghanistan. We are there to protect. We are there to make life better. We must address the reasons why we should remain in Afghanistan until 2011. Again, these are linked to security and to prevention of terrorism because a safe Afghanistan, free from the Taliban, makes the region, makes Canada, and indeed, makes the world a safer place to be.

The efforts of Canada and our allies have some great gains in this mission including furthering democratic elections and institutions. We can all remember seeing millions of Afghans voting just a few short years ago. Just last week a group of Afghan women parliamentarians were here in the House of Commons. What a great day it was. What a testament to the progress that has been made. What a testament to the lives that have paid the ultimate price. What a testament to what Canada is doing in that far away country.

Those women would not be standing in this House without the security and aid of Canada and our allies, and the brave Afghans who have rejected barbarism and terrorism. To keep these gains moving forward we need to increase the number of troops and give them better equipment. The decade of decay in our Canadian military is over.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence have made great efforts with our allies to find 1,000 more troops to partner with Canada in Kandahar. With the passage of this motion, Canada will have a clear mandate at the upcoming NATO conference in Bucharest.

Medium lift helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles recommended by Mr. Manley will greatly aid our troops in doing their job effectively. They will also hopefully lead to preventing more deaths from IEDs. Medium lift helicopters will allow our troops to avoid dangerous stretches of highway. UAVs will allow our troops to search out the Taliban and deal with them before they cause more trouble.

The insurgents that our troops are fighting in Kandahar province are the same insurgents that will again fight to instill this brutal regime on the people of Afghanistan. They are the same insurgents that would forbid girls from going to school and would forbid basic health care needs to women.

We have a chance in Afghanistan to make a real difference in the lives of people who want the same things we want here in Canada. The Afghan people want a better world for their children than the one they have.

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● (2145)

Let us look at the progress in the few short years we have been there: the vaccination of more than seven million children against polio, including approximately 350,000 in Kandahar province; the delivery of food aid to more than 400,000 people in Kandahar; and 83% of Afghans now have access to basic medical care.

We have made great strides in the economy of Afghanistan. Per capita income has doubled between 2004 and 2007.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member does not sound like he is winding up, but his time wound up a minute or so ago.

Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague and friend from Avalon for his remarks and his presence tonight to take part in what is a historic event.

He has recited quite accurately some of the improvements and changes for the positive that we see happening in Afghanistan. In particular, he personalized it quite rightly by comparing it to his young daughter's own future in Canada and compared to what young women in Afghanistan face. The improvements they see in their lives are a direct result of the contributions of Canadians and the allies.

I think he was headed in the direction of discussing some of the other important improvements in the area of the economy. There are businesses now opening. Merchants are able to trade their goods both internally and externally. The infrastructure is improving so that those same merchants can bring goods to neighbouring communities and people are free to seek out new economic opportunities. The micro finance credit is another area, of course, where women in particular are the direct beneficiaries.

I wonder if the member would take the opportunity to reflect a little further on the situation where some of the economic principles are taking root and some of the opportunities that will flow from this. He mentioned the GDP, for example, of the country expanding. I wonder if he would expand a little further on how the economy and the GDP is benefiting from Canada's presence in Afghanistan.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Mr. Speaker, once again, I want to congratulate the Minister of National Defence. He is doing a superb job on behalf of Canada.

Certainly, the economy of Afghanistan is changing. As I touched on earlier, per capita income doubled between 2004 and 2007 and Canada is the top micro finance program donor. More than 418,000 people are accessing small loans and savings services in 23 provinces, including Kandahar.

More important than that, and another statistic I am sure people would like to know, more than two-thirds of those 418,000 people are women. There is no doubt that Canadian assistance is supporting skills development throughout Afghanistan and we are indeed making a difference in the lives of these people.

At the end of the day, the important thing is that the people of Afghanistan are given the opportunities that we have here in Canada,

that they be allowed to grow, expand and have the freedom to be able to choose to do what they want to do. That is the underlying principle that we are trying to establish in Afghanistan and, more importantly, I believe and I am sure many Canadians believe, we are succeeding in doing just that.

● (2150)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand what the hon. member has said in his speech and the good things we are doing in Afghanistan.

How can we guarantee the Canadian public that we will in fact finish what we are doing by 2011? In other words, can we comfortably say there will be a military victory in light of the fact that not long ago 100,000 troops from the Soviet Union were not able to achieve a military victory?

How many more troops will it take? Is it conceivable that we will be there for a long haul? Ultimately, does he really think that we can achieve a complete military victory in Afghanistan?

Mr. Fabian Manning: Mr. Speaker, achieving a military success in Afghanistan certainly would not be done by packing up and going home.

This is the philosophy that is being put forward by the NDP in the House. I have sat here and listened to it for several months. Members of the NDP say: "Let us go over and negotiate, let us go over and talk to these people to see if we can find a resolution to the concerns we have".

The Taliban are very difficult people to talk to, people who have abused children, abused women, and used them as shields to put forward their concerns. They have brought about injustices on the Afghan people over the past number of decades. How are we going to negotiate with them?

I challenge the NDP in the House to select four or five of its members to go to Afghanistan and carry out those negotiations, and carry out those consultations in the mountains of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and then come back and report to us, if they are lucky to get back out alive and tell us how the negotiations went so that maybe we can solve this crisis.

I doubt very much that they would go, and I certainly doubt that they would return. The Taliban are not interested in peace. They are not interested in giving people a chance to have a better life. They are interested in destroying the country and destroying the people.

We as Canadians will not sit idly by and let that happen. That is why we are in Afghanistan and that is why we are going to stay there until the job is done.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again it is a pleasure to be here in this full House and to talk to all my hon. colleagues.

My hon. colleague from Manitoba would like to use my notes later on for his speech and I am sure that I can make them available to him.

Benjamin Franklin once said that the definition of insanity was doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

I would like to begin by talking a bit about a former Soviet soldier, Sergeant Nikolai Lanine, who served in Afghanistan and who now lives in Canada.

Some would say that there is no similarity between the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 and today's NATO efforts to assist in the stabilization and democracy there, but Lanine's experience in Afghanistan lifted a veil of propaganda from his eyes and now he worries that in fact we are making many of the exact same mistakes that the Soviets did.

Let us go back in history to 1978. At that time, Afghanistan had a relatively progressive secular government with labour unions, health care, women's rights, girls in school and land reform. Nour Mohammed Taraki, a Marxist, was asked by the army to form a government. The U.S., along with the CIA, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan reacted by training Muslim extremists, the mujahedeen, and Taraki was killed in 1970.

The Soviets invaded in 1980 and the U.S. armed Muslim extremists, among them bin Laden, in its quest to overthrow the Soviet occupation. As we know, the Soviets left in 1989 and the extremists, or Taliban, were able to seize power.

Interestingly enough, in the 1990s, the U.S. invested financially by encouraging the Taliban government to sign a contract with Unicol to build a gas pipeline south from the Caspian basin to Pakistan. The point to note here is that when oil was on the agenda, the U.S. government was ready and willing to negotiate with the Taliban.

In the spring of 2001, the negotiations broke down. President Karzai, the president of Afghanistan, was a consultant for Unicol during the failed negotiations with the Taliban. Another point to note is that Karzai's current government consists of many of these warlords, drug lords and oil executives, in addition to other agents from other countries.

In 2005, the UN documented atrocities committed by the U.S. backed northern alliance, many of whom currently serve in the Afghanistan government. Human Rights Watch found that 60 of the Afghan legislators have links to warlords, 20 still have active private militias and 20 or more have been involved in drug smuggling.

President Karzai himself stated that the warlords and private militias, who were once regarded as the west's staunchest allies in Afghanistan, were now a greater threat to the country's security than the Taliban.

This is a situation that we find ourselves in today in Afghanistan where it is not a war of good versus evil. In the province of Nangarhar, for example, in April 2004, women were still banned from performing on TV and radio and where opium was dominating Afghanistan's economy. The country is being turned into a narco state under the noses of NATO.

A 2005 report by Amnesty International found that violence against women and girls was pervasive. At the same time, 70% of the population is undernourished, while infant mortality is twice that of the third world average.

At any rate, let us get back to Nikolai Lanine. In his youth he read in the papers that the Soviet army was in Afghanistan to help build a

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stable society. Later he learned that his best friend was part of a group of soldiers who had been ambushed, savagely mutilated and then executed. Later, Lanine himself was drafted and wound up in Afghanistan in 1987.

Today his library includes 1980s articles from the Soviet newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestia* which state:

“Working together, Soviet and Afghan government forces this month successfully cleared Kandahar of insurgent activities.

The goals of the new Afghan constitution are to establish peace and guarantee the rights of all Afghans.

● (2155)

Lanine said that these humanitarian perspectives, remarkably like those in contemporary Canadian news and opinions, were not just official propaganda. Many Soviet citizens genuinely felt them. A former Soviet commander told CNN News many years later that “We had set ourselves a task of turning Afghanistan into a stable, friendly country”. As he hears of personal eulogies, politicians, condolences and military tributes to our fallen soldiers, Lanine could not help but state that he had heard it all before.

The Soviet citizens were told that their army was there to help the Afghan people to establish a peaceful, prosperous Afghanistan, to protect women's rights and to have a better future for children. Here in the west the Soviet claims were, of course, ridiculed as twisted propaganda by our leaders and our media. The motives were regarded as actually plausible that included blatant colonizing, propping up an unpopular pro-Soviet regime, creating a buffer zone and, most important of all, reaching for oil.

President Carter at that time announced that the Soviets had advanced into a strategic position that posed a grave threat to the free flow of Middle East oil. U.S. President Regan dubbed the violent Afghan rebels “the moral equivalent of our founding fathers,” and sent waves of covert aid, including to the early Taliban and Osama bin Laden.

The massive U.S. support transformed these ragtag Afghan mercenaries into a major, modernized fighting force. In other words, it was the west that enabled the repressive Taliban government to seize power once the Soviets left, a similar situation to when the U.S. provided Saddam Hussein with biological and chemical weapons in the Iraq-Iran war. Soviet forces immediately came under siege while hurriedly buttressing the Afghan government, army and police.

Like NATO since 2002, it then launched counter-insurgency operations, relying heavily on bombings, search and destroy operations and house to house invasions to rout out the terrorists. However, like in more recent years, the hammer-fisted combat operations started converting many average Afghan people into enemies. Reconstruction slowed and destruction skyrocketed.

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By the time Lanine arrived, the Soviets were choosing battles more carefully and primarily trying not to make things worse. His own unit mainly performed counter insurgency operations along supply routes. When not fighting, Lanine's unit delivered food, firewood, clothing, school books and other supplies to ordinary Afghan people. They built hydro lines, protected Soviet doctors working in villages and loaned trucks for home construction.

Unfortunately, Lanine said that all of that together principally created widespread distrust and the shifting of allegiances and, for similar reasons, a coalition of 160 international relief agencies requested that NATO basically shut down the provincial reconstruction teams. Maintaining stability amidst all of that, explained Lanine, much like NATO is experiencing today, became an intermittent but never-ending barrage of low level fighting.

He worked as a grenade launcher with a two kilometre range. He said that often he did not know who he was shooting at and if anyone was killed. For him, as layers of indoctrination peeled away, philosophical thoughts crept in. He wonder who the suicide bomber was trying to attack and whether it was the Canadian soldiers in Kandahar? He said that we did not see that side of the story and that it was the same in the Soviet media.

He said that it was taken for granted that whoever resisted them must be bad. Lanine began to see that not everyone was a political fanatic. They were just regular people, many of whom had lost family members. His journals show where he was struggling with his growing moral doubts after their unit, in an accident tragically similar to a 2002 U.S. air strike, mortared an Afghan wedding. He found himself sympathizing deeply with every Afghan on all sides, understanding them simply as human, just like him, caught in chaotic, miserable circumstances.

According to estimates, 15,000 Soviets and 1.5 million Afghans were killed during the occupation. One-third of Afghans were refugees. However, it was the final fall out that taught Lanine a penultimate lesson. Once Soviet combat troops withdrew, instead of launching coordinated disarmament and calling for independent peacekeepers, both superpowers left the warlords to battle their differences out over the bodies of the civilian population.

• (2200)

For him, that illustrated that underlying all the self-aggrandizing bluster from westerners and Soviets alike about their noble intentions in Afghanistan, there was a lack of real concern for the Afghan people themselves.

I am not saying that is the case today. What I am saying and what we are trying to underline is that there might be a better way of bringing some kind of peace to this region without just continuing a war effort that may last indefinitely.

It upsets Lanine to see this happening all over again. Although the Soviet intervention was much larger in scale, it was not fundamentally different than NATO's intervention today. According to him, they were both acts of aggression where foreign armies tried to make a nation fit their vision for what it should be. Afghans themselves, like the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, also make the comparison.

The obvious parallel, he adds, is the most insidious: the propaganda. He points to the government gags in reporting Canadian wounded, for example. After 9/11, he particularly noticed increasingly self-righteous drumming as bin Laden, the Taliban and the failed state of Afghanistan were portrayed this time as purely tyrannical agents of destruction.

He states:

Nobody was really seriously discussing the roots of the whole militant Muslim movement in Afghanistan. It was very shocking for me, how wrong the memory was. It wasn't something I expected to see here. I couldn't believe how much a supposedly democratic society was shifting towards unquestionable acceptance of war.

"I'm not sure what we should be doing," comments Lanine. "I only know that what we're doing right now was tried before, and it failed. Are they feeling better about being bombed by NATO than they were under the Soviets?"

Sonali Kolhatkar and James Ingalls, in their new book *Bleeding Afghanistan: Washington, Warlords, and the Propaganda of Silence*, present reams of evidence dispelling many common beliefs about our impacts. They describe in detail botched elections, a government riddled with notorious warlords, shocking setbacks to women's rights, legalized private and religious militias, civilian massacres and stalled reconstruction, all fueling popular disaffection.

NATO countries, including Canada, are calling for more combat troops but the Soviets used six times as many as NATO currently has and they still describe it as fighting an octopus with one hand. According to Kolhatkar and Ingalls, we should do what surveys show most Afghans want, and that is to bring in peacekeepers under UN control, stop hunting combat, make this army sufficiently lucrative and direct reconstruction money through grassroots, Afghan-led initiatives that give poor Afghans employment rather than through multinational contracts.

Let us take a moment to put all this into perspective. Let us put aside the rhetoric, step aside and look at what has happened.

According to a *Maclean's* magazine article, it was our current Chief of Staff, General Rick Hillier, who convinced the prime minister in 2005 to undertake a combat role in Afghanistan. He wanted Canada to prove ourselves to the Americans and to the world. That was the main reason given, if I am not mistaken, as he attempted to and subsequently did convince our government to lead a search and destroy mission in Kandahar.

I do not think there is ever a need for members of the Canadian armed forces to prove themselves. Myself having served in the armed forces, I see and have seen first-hand the dedication and professionalism of our men and women in uniform. We do not need to go into a special type of combat to show how good we are.

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I had the good fortune in 1990 of accompanying the Royal Canadian Navy into Vladivostok as an interpreter with the commander of the HMCS *Provider*. I noticed then the respect that our former enemies had for the professionalism of our Canadian armed forces. I would like to reiterate that we do not need to go to war to prove ourselves. We do have that capability if and when the need arises to do that.

It is up to us here in Parliament to make the right decision and to ensure that we do not send our young people unless it is obviously necessary and not as some token of support for American policy. It is absolutely imperative that a peace process be started in Afghanistan as we signify our intent to leave. Let us remember that this does not happen overnight. We must press NATO and other major players in this region to start discussions toward a ceasefire and a peace settlement.

• (2205)

In the debate over the future of Afghanistan, others are also calling for a new approach. President Karzai, Afghan parliamentarians and aid groups have all spoken of the need to start a dialogue, which will bring about a lasting peace. Sixty-five per cent of Afghans say that disarmament is the most important step toward improving security in Afghanistan. This is a major step as we try to push for a truce.

The vision of peace must be carried out by the United Nations, which explicit mandate is to preserve and promote international peace and security.

UN peacekeeping missions have been successful in East Timor, Cambodia and Mozambique. In East Timor, with the help of the UN, the Timorese were able to surmount incredible odds to create a largely stable and successful state.

Many criticized this approach as being too idealistic, and I have heard these comments from the other side today, and state that a strong military presence is needed before any peace and reconciliation is to begin.

However, once again, how much military strength and how far do we have to go before we can somehow ensure a peaceful and stable area? Would it not be better to start a process where we can provide incentives for groups, warlords and other groups and those who may not be the extreme fanatics to start to lay down their arms and bring in the United Nations under that umbrella to work on some kind of a reconciliation between all warring factions?

Remember, it is not a black and white situation. The fallacy of this argument that we need a strong presence is that there will always have to be a strong external military force at constant war with the other side. This did not work with 100,000 Soviet troops, and it will not work today with NATO. That situation does not bring stability. The only stability that can take place is under a peace process where, gradually, all fighting comes to an end. Then and only then will true reconstruction begin.

The Afghan people will have to construct the future themselves, with help, but not interference, from others. Canada has the golden opportunity to encourage this process. What is to stop our Prime Minister, now as we are in Afghanistan, as we debate this, from reaching out to other NATO countries, countries in the region and the Taliban and others and to say, "Let's try to work on some kind of

a dialogue and peace process?" It happened in Vietnam. We were successful in Northern Ireland. We did negotiate with terrorists and now there is peace. What is to stop this process from at least starting?

As I speak, a very unpleasant thought keeps coming back.

First, does the United States, for example, truly want to see a peaceful solution in Afghanistan or does it want a military victory to further its own interests? If this is the case, what are we doing fighting alongside with the U.S.?

Second, will the U.S. ever allow an Afghan government to take power that may not be in the best interests of U.S. foreign policy? If in fact the U.S. sees Afghanistan as a vital link in a geopolitical policy to ensure an American presence in the area, is this the only reason that the U.S. is there, as in Iraq? If this is the only reason, that is more reason for Canada to pull out of Afghanistan and signify that we will participate only under a UN-led peacekeeping mission.

We have a chance today in Parliament to change the direction of the course of history for our Canadian military and the Canadian people. We have a chance as we are in Afghanistan, as we negotiate a gradual pull-out, to start negotiating a peace settlement and discussions among all groups. It is worth a try. Talking has never hurt. We can and we should make a difference.

• (2210)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the member's arguments are false. He tries to draw parallels between the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1970 and early 1980, and our mission in Afghanistan today.

The biggest difference between the two missions is that the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan under unilateral auspices. We are in Afghanistan, however, under multilateral auspices, under multilateral organizations like NATO and the United Nations. That is the biggest difference between those two missions. I do not think he can draw the strong parallels between those two, which he has tried to draw.

The biggest problem with the member's argument is this call for an immediate unilateral withdrawal of our military from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The United States, the United Kingdom and Canada pursued a policy of isolation in the 19th century, a policy with respect to engagement in European affairs. However, the bloodshed of the 20th century taught us one thing. It taught us that we could not live in isolation, that we must be engaged in the world. That is why external affairs diplomats like Hume Wrong and Norman Robertson helped to construct multilateral institutions like the United Nations and like NATO.

What follows from the position of member for the New Democrats is one of two things. Either it is returned to the isolation of the 19th century, or he is asking the Canadian government to do diplomacy and development work without defence.

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• (2215)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. member's questions and I understand his comments.

With regard to false arguments and whether our situation parallels that of the unilateral invasion of the Soviet Union, once again, we have to look at what the former Soviet soldier says as he tries to make the comparison and finds parallels in his mind. Whether it is a multilateral or unilateral intervention, there are still a number of troops that are in combat against people who are there, and in this case the Taliban and those who support them. I am not quite sure what difference it makes, whether it is unilateral or multilateral. War is still going on. As I have tried to point out, there is chaos and it is not simple black and white.

As far as isolationism, I challenge the member. If we go into Afghanistan with the United Nations, under a UN flag, in no way does it signify isolationism. In fact, it signifies that we are ready to work with the world community to foster some kind of a process where people can at least talk to form a peace and a truce.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is an extremely amazing party. It is unbelievable how it comes along with the logic of this thing, and totally forget about reality.

He talks about unilateral and multilateral. He says that there is not a difference between unilateral and multilateral. There is a difference.

First, the members of the NDP say that they want a UN mission. This is a UN mission under the UN authority by the security council. However, they do not want to recognize that. What other UN authority they want, I have no idea.

Then they say that we need to have capacity out there to go ahead now that NATO is working under the UN. I have no idea what peacekeeping they are talking about, and with people who do not want to even comment.

Perhaps my hon. colleague has seen the neighbour reconstruction offered by the neighbours of Afghanistan. Every country, India, Pakistan and China are all putting money into reconstruction of that country. Perhaps he should look at those reports and understand what is happening there.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I do not need any lessons and neither does my party from the member of the opposing party. If he thinks our party is so amazing, he is welcome to submit an application and maybe we will accept it.

The reality is everybody understands, and we understand, that the UN sanctioned this mission and it designated NATO as the organization to carry this out. What my party and I are trying to point out is we may be taking the wrong direction. Maybe we should be pursuing another direction that will bring a lasting peace and not some kind of a peace that is based on so many thousand or a hundred thousand troops that go back and forth depending on who wins the military victory.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the NDP accept the fact that this mission was sanctioned by the United Nations? Does he accept the fact that it is a NATO mission?

Does he accept the Afghanistan compact, which has tried to unite countries from diverse backgrounds in order to rebuild Afghanistan? That is the fundamental difference between this mission, which is UN sanctioned, NATO-led, and involves Iran and neighbouring countries in the Afghanistan compact. That is a fundamental difference from a country like the Soviet Union moving in its tanks to occupy another country for its own will and its own reasons.

Does the NDP accept that this is a UN-NATO mission, yes or no?

• (2220)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I thought I made it clear. I understand the UN has sanctioned this mission and designated NATO to undertake it. We should also understand that U.S. forces operating in Afghanistan do not come under this mission. They are in there unilaterally.

The difference is this is a combat mission. NATO is designated by the UN, but we are in a combat mission. We are not in there to try to keep sides apart so there could at least be some kind of lasting peace process.

Is it not worth the try? Is it not worth one life to see if there can be at least some kind of peaceful settlement in that turbulent area of the world?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we kind of got somewhere along the way of what I was hoping to establish with the member. I appreciate the fact that my colleague asked him whether he understood there was a difference between a UN sanctioned mission, a mission where a democratically elected government asked us to stay and defend it.

The member kept on saying that we had a chance. We have a chance to defend people like the six female members of parliament, who were here last week. They asked us not to abandon them. They asked us not to give up the gains that they had made. They asked us to defend them, to stand with them. They are building a democratic republic in Afghanistan where women are respected, where children have an opportunity to succeed, where business can succeed. They told us they were building a real nation.

Why does the member not see that? Why does he not support it?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, is it not much easier to build a nation when there is a truce and a peaceful settlement? That is my question.

If it is much easier, why do we not at least try to bring some kind of a truce and disarmament to that turbulent country? Why must we continue with a combat mission where we increase our troops every year with an indefinite end to this mission? Is it not worth trying some diplomatic solutions? Those are my questions to the member.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the subject, it gives me great pleasure to rise here this evening. This is a matter of great importance for both Canada and Afghanistan. As we heard earlier, people have been asking questions that suggest they have already made up their minds. Nevertheless, this evening, I hope that I will be able to clarify the New Democratic Party's reasons for its position on this issue, which is simply that the combat mission in southern Afghanistan must end, and a comprehensive peace process must be undertaken.

To begin, I would like to clarify one thing that is very important to many people in Quebec. I did not think that I would have to do this because things were becoming clear, but today, for reasons of their own, some of my Bloc Québécois colleagues deliberately chose to further confuse the situation with respect to individuals' votes.

I will use evidence from the record to explain the differences between how the Bloc Québécois has voted and how the New Democratic Party has voted over the past few years.

Let us begin with April 24, 2007. For those who are interested, that was when a vote was held here in the House. Without exception, all members of the Bloc Québécois who were here in the House voted in favour of a motion to extend the mission in Afghanistan until February 2009. In September 2006, the New Democratic Party resolved to put an end to the combat mission in southern Afghanistan, so obviously, we could not support a motion to extend the mission until 2009. However, the Bloc Québécois did support extending the mission in southern Afghanistan at least until February 2009.

I said "at least until" because, as reported in the newspaper, *Le Soleil*, on May 24, 2007, the Bloc Québécois national defence critic said that the Bloc was prepared to agree to extending the mission in Afghanistan beyond February 2009.

Those who wish to do so may look this up on line. The motion I am talking about, which was debated here, was put forward on April 19, 2007, but the House voted on it on Tuesday, April 24. All of the Bloc Québécois members are listed there. Beginning with their leader, all of the Bloc members voted for war. It could not possibly be any clearer. There is no ambiguity at all on this issue.

Then, a few days later, on April 30, 2007, there was a vote on an NDP motion. All of the Bloc members present voted with the Conservatives to reject an NDP motion to immediately inform the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, that we planned on withdrawing from the mission in Afghanistan. We could even look back at the various speeches made in the House. I would like to quote the Bloc Québécois defence critic. During the debate on this topic, he said: "Obviously, I must say to my NDP friends—at least we are friends [speaker's emphasis]—that we cannot support their motion today."

There are two things here. When there is a motion to continue the war, the Bloc votes—as a group—in favour. When there is an NDP motion to withdraw the troops, the Bloc votes against the motion.

As unbelievable as this may be, I gave this bit of background tonight—even if that was not my plan when I prepared my speech—because Bloc members tried to put a spin on these two historic votes,

which are duly noted in the official record of Parliament and are easily accessible online for anyone who is interested. I could not believe that Bloc members said that Canada was going to be in Afghanistan until 2011 because in 2007 we had not supported the motion to continue the war until 2009 only.

● (2225)

As though that would have changed anything. We were against the war. That is a principle. In September 2006, the very first NDP event that I attended after leaving the Government of Quebec was a major meeting in Quebec City at which the NDP adopted this controversial but clear position.

I know the Bloc members do not like things that are clear. They prefer to try to beat around the bush and cultivate an image that can be read more than one way. But the truth, the simple truth, is that when faced with the possibility of an end to the mission, as we proposed, and the withdrawal of our troops, they said no. When faced with a motion to continue the war, they said yes.

As I said earlier, they are now trying to say that if only we had voted to end the war in February 2009, it would not be continuing today. How naive. As if the Conservatives, who are determined to continue this war, would be influenced today by a vote held in 2007 that would have established February 2009 as the end date for the mission. That is absurd.

The only way to deal with this is with clear positions. Although I completely disagree with the position of the Conservative government, at least that position is clear. One can be for or against it, but it exists.

The position of the NDP is also, dare I say, quite clear. We are against the war in Afghanistan. We are for a comprehensive peace process. We believe that NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, was created to wage war. It cannot be involved in peacekeeping missions. That is not within its mandate.

After the tragic events of September 11, the Americans established Operation Enduring Freedom, which resulted in the attack on Afghanistan. Canada was involved in this operation from the start of that attack, or early in 2003, even while we were saying no to Iraq. The decision to commit our troops to the military mission in southern Afghanistan was almost a consolation prize that we gave the Americans to make up for our daring refusal to go to war in Iraq. That was five years ago.

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We are about to agree to an additional three years. In the end, we will have spent more time in Afghanistan than we did in Europe during World War II. We were there from the beginning, in September 1, 1939, until the end of the war on May 8, 1945, and until August 1945, with respect to the war in the Pacific. Canada was there the entire time. The Afghanistan war will last even longer. And with what results? According to all the experts—from those in Sandhurst, England, to those in the United States—this war cannot be won under current conditions.

I heard some MPs earlier discussing with my colleague whether or not we can compare our current involvement to that of the Soviets. However, I will take it upon myself to inform them that ever since the former Soviet Union invaded in December 1979, this poor country—and I do mean poor because it is one of the poorest countries in the world—has been almost continually in the throes of war. And we are about to contribute to more violence and more conflict but not to increased security, no matter what the opinion of those who have already spoken this evening. It is wrong to claim that there is greater security as a result of our intervention in Afghanistan.

There are always those who will say such things during a war. We will not start saying that we do not believe it is a good cause. Naturally, we have succeeded in convincing ourselves that, since we are good people, our presence in Afghanistan must be a noble cause. But that is not the case. Our presence in Afghanistan has nothing to do with our own strategic interests and everything to do with what the former Conservative Minister of Defence had the honesty to say: that it was retribution for the attack against the Americans on September 11, 2001.

● (2230)

The problem with that is that 19 of the 20 hijackers were Saudi Arabians, not Afghans. People will say that there were al-Qaeda training bases in Afghanistan and even that bin Laden was hiding up in the mountains and so on. Is that any reason for Canada to maintain a military presence there without making an ongoing effort to achieve peace based on a comprehensive structure?

To date, 79 young Canadians have returned home from Afghanistan in coffins. How many others will suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome? How many ticking time bombs are we creating?

This is a heavy price to pay for our involvement in a mission that was originally an attempt by NATO to support the government in place. With the Bonn process, that original mission evolved into an attempt to involve not only NATO, but a number of other countries in an international security and reaction force, but the people behind the Bonn process acted like children who cover their eyes and think that everything has disappeared. They did not include the Taliban in the Bonn process.

I hear the jeering of the government members, who say that you cannot negotiate with people who behave in this way in a conflict and who use terror and schemes like this.

But the fact is that because of its history and the pride it takes in working for peace, Canada has succeeded on a number of occasions when people thought it was impossible. John de Chastelain, in Northern Ireland, is the latest example. I am in no way excusing the

tactics used by the IRA in Northern Ireland, but the fact is that they engaged in terrorist acts and the government said in no uncertain terms that it would never negotiate with terrorists. Success came only when there was agreement in Northern Ireland to bring everyone together at the same table.

What a sight it was to see former IRA leaders, now elected members of the parliament of Northern Ireland, seated at the same table as Reverend Ian Paisley. No one would have thought it possible 20 years ago. And yet, this parliament works. In a place where there was war, negotiators succeeded in dealing with all the parties involved and securing peace. On the strength of its experience and credibility in keeping and monitoring peace, Canada was able to impose a system where the IRA would withdraw its weapons. And it worked.

Some of my colleagues sincerely believe that if Canada were not in Afghanistan today, the situation would revert to what used to be with respect to schools and so on. I heard them say so earlier. The NDP is not saying that it does not want to continue working there. We are just pointing out a simple fact: NATO was created for the purpose of war. We cannot place ourselves in a conflict of interest. We are promoting peace by means of war. That is what we are doing when we say that, and it does not work. It is a paradox.

The motions before us are also paradoxical, and it is worth spending a little time examining them. Those who wish to check the House of Commons' on-line documents for today will find the motion currently before us and the New Democratic Party's amendment. Why simplify things when they can be so complicated? The motion goes on for four pages, but the NDP's amendment is just three paragraphs long.

In the motion, there are many historical references to our activities in Afghanistan. The Conservative government is having a bit of fun at the Liberals' expense to prove that even though the Liberals like speaking out against war, they supported these measures at every stage of the game. This brief reminder of what went on is a good idea.

● (2235)

Even though what I said earlier is true, namely that the Conservatives have a clear position with which people disagree and the NDP has a clear position with which people may or may not agree, the Liberals, as usual, are being wishy-washy. They will say anything. They might be all for the war on a Tuesday morning and against it on Thursday afternoon. We will train the Afghan troops and if war breaks out, we will be there. You should read all four pages. I invite people to go on line and read them. It is quite something. It is tortuous. They talk about changes and carrying on until 2011 and that they will try to ensure that there are conditions. The conditions are generally taken from the Manley report.

That is another paradox. In supporting the Manley report, the Conservatives have always said they are opposed to the NDP and others who dare speak up for peace. There are just two paths. There are not 36 different options: either we continue the war or we work toward peace. The NDP prefers to use Canada's experience, expertise and credibility to work toward peace. However, we will let the Conservatives explain their desire to pursue war.

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The NDP is saying this has not worked and, under such conditions, Canada should withdraw. The Conservatives are saying that is shameful. They talk about schools and people. They say that our position on withdrawing in light of the conditions is irresponsible. That is what we have heard from a number of people who have spoken this evening.

And yet, what do we find verbatim in the Conservative government motion supported by the wishy-washy Liberal party? It says:

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

That is where the Conservatives get tough: they impose a condition. They want to continue the war for another three years. How many more young Canadians will come home in coffins and how many more will be physically wounded or psychologically scarred? The Conservatives impose conditions to show how tough they are. The motion continues:

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

There is a slight difference between the French and English versions. The English version says "(operational no later than February 2009)". The difference could prove to be a problem one day, since the English version is peremptory. It describes an obligation of result. If we do not have the 1,000 troops, we will withdraw.

The same people who are saying that the NDP is irresponsible for talking about withdrawing our troops, considering the current conditions, are setting a condition requiring 1,000 more troops, without which we will withdraw. This is the Conservatives' second paradox. They have the gall to say that it is irresponsible to talk about the possibility of withdrawing our troops in February 2009. But the motion expressly states that we will withdraw our troops in February 2009 if the condition of 1,000 additional troops is not met. Coincidentally, they are soon going to Bucharest, Romania, and will likely be successful in obtaining 1,000 troops. If they do not get the troops, they will be forced to withdraw our troops according to the terms of their own motion.

The second condition also refers to February 2009. It talks about the use of medium helicopter lift capacity and unmanned aerial vehicles for aerial surveillance.

From paradox to paradox, the mission is failing. When we see that we are spending ten times more on the military component than on rebuilding, the government's arguments or attempts to convince us that this is a peace or rebuilding mission are revealed for what they are. It is immediately clear that this is not the case.

This is a combat mission. The treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan is another big problem. I will likely have a chance to talk more about this when I respond to questions.

• (2240)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certain that all Bloc members here this evening noted the NDP member's convoluted critique.

[English]

He did not stop at being convoluted with that critique. He stayed convoluted for the rest of his remarks. There are so many things to take up, but I am going to take up a couple.

Actually there have been 80 Canadians killed because civilians count and I am sure the family of Glyn Berry would appreciate him being remembered as well.

Also, 11 minus 9 is 2. It is an extension of two years, not three. He should do a little more math.

The point I really want to make is that he said twice that NATO was created to wage war. That is patently ridiculous. NATO was created to keep the peace. My helmet was not blue, but what was I doing in CF-104s and CF-18s for 30 years flying in Europe and other places if it was not keeping the peace? That kind of statement is absolutely ridiculous and absolutely outrageous and he should apologize to everyone who has ever served in NATO.

My question is one which I did ask before, but I will ask it slightly differently. Is there anything that the New Democratic Party members would be willing to actually take up arms for, or will they always, as John Stuart Mill would say, rely on better men than themselves to make and keep people free?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I will respond in English having heard the member's French.

If we look at the paragraph that I was referring to earlier, the paragraph that explains the extension of the mission, it says that the withdrawal will start in July 2011 but it will be completed by the end of December 2011. So, from February 2009, that means all of 2009, it means all of 2010, and believe it or not, December is the last month of 2011, so that means all of 2011. In case the member has as much trouble with his math as with his French, it is important for him to understand that it is another three years.

The other thing that I can tell the member, despite the number of years that he tells us he spent flying around Europe, is that NATO is not a peacekeeping organization. NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, was created to wage war, to be the first line of defence against the former Soviet Union. It is the United Nations, and that is why the New Democratic Party of Canada is in favour of handing this mission over to the United Nations—

• (2245)

Mr. James Rajotte: That is absolutely untrue.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: That is ridiculous. Read the NATO charter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The hon. member for Edmonton Centre did ask a question and some hon. members are preventing the Speaker from hearing the response. If members could just allow the hon. member for Outremont a few more seconds to respond, then we will move on the next question.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I have become accustomed to the heckling. I just do not listen to it any more.

Despite the fact that we do not agree, we in the NDP at least have a clear position and Canadians can judge.

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Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was a very interesting comment about the heckling and the response to it. It was very interesting, quite enlightening I think for those of us who were in the House the other day.

I agree with the hon. member that the NDP members do have a clear position. They do not support the mission. They do not support the Canadian military. They do not support our men and women in uniform. In my short time in the House, the 10 years that I have been here, they never have. I am glad that he clarified that statement.

I listened to the hon. member describe the difference between the Bloc's position and the NDP's position, but in many ways it is one cat's kittens. There are really a lot of similarities in the two positions.

I will pick up on the question that my colleague asked. We are a partisan group here and we have different opinions. We come from different parts of the spectrum, but surely the hon. member would agree that there is a time and place when there is no choice but to respond to force with force. I see no way around that. The world has not changed significantly in any way, shape or form since mankind's early combats between countries.

I have a comment about Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland cannot be compared in any way shape or form to Afghanistan. Ireland is two countries divided on one island with a common language, with both sides of the struggle being educated, having access to outside media, having knowledge of what is going on in the rest of the world.

There is no comparison in the two struggles.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, where do I begin after an intervention of that kind. I actually do understand a few things from last week better myself.

When I hear the member say that we do not support our men and women in uniform, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact we all support, respect and admire each and every member of the Canadian armed forces.

Where we differ with the Conservative government is with the mission. We have no quarrel with the individuals serving. We have nothing but admiration and respect for them. We have a profound and great difference of opinion with the government on how they should be performing their jobs and where.

So do not try to put words in our mouth about respecting people in uniform. It is just not true. It also shows the paucity of the arguments of the Conservatives. They have nothing to say. I just listened to the comments and it is amazing. It is true sometimes when there is bullying that we do have to push back.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen from the hon. member a fairly impressive degree of pomposity in his commentary. There is one thing that I find a paradox and a perverse argument that the member made here and we have heard it from other members of his party. It is their adherence to the belief that somehow the rights, the protections, the ability to provide humanitarian relief, the ability to continue to rebuild that wartorn country is somehow going to mysteriously happen without the assistance of the international security force,

without the ability to provide the security, that this will somehow fall from the heavens as if twice blessed upon the people below, as if somehow this could happen mysteriously.

We hear from the NDP members repeatedly their genuine belief, and I do believe it is genuine, that they want to promote women's rights, that they do embrace the diversity that exists within Afghanistan, the religious diversity, the cultural diversity, that they do support the women who were here last week. No one doubts their sincerity in that regard.

What is absolutely irreconcilable is to suggest that those same women who will return to their country could enjoy those protections and those rights and that ability to participate in the democratic society that has been created in Afghanistan. I was reading today about a young woman from Afghanistan who is going to compete in the Beijing Olympics. I heard from the ambassador of Afghanistan today who told a horrific story about a grandmother and her grandchild who were nailed to a tree by the Taliban as a form of assassination, public extermination of human life. We heard about people being thrown down wells, children being barred from education, absolutely atrocious human rights abuses that should be before war tribunals.

How can the member seriously suggest that to go back to that type of life which is what would happen without the presence of the international security force, how can he reconcile those two positions when he stands here today and lectures us in such a haughty and pompous way? How can he suggest that could happen?

• (2250)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, of all the things I have heard since the beginning of what was until a few minutes ago a rather interesting debate, that is the most pathetic nonsense that I have heard in this House on Afghanistan since the start of the debate. It is embarrassing to know that this man is actually a minister of the Crown. That type of demonization of the adversary is a classic when trying to defend an otherwise indefensible war.

What we are saying, and we are very proud to say it, is that Canada has played over its history and especially in the past 50 years an honourable role in the world for creating conditions for peace. It was only thanks to French television, TF1, that we saw Canadian troops involved in search and destroy missions. That is what the Conservatives have us involved in. We want us out and we do want to protect the civilian population.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I want to urge all hon. members to stay away from personal comments about other members. There were a few exchanges while the member for Outremont was responding to the question that I thought were pushing the limits of parliamentary language. If we could finish off the debate with a bit more civility, it would be appreciated.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is great to see everyone here at this hour.

I would like to start with some questions for the government. I asked them before dinner, but I kind of rushed them at the end of my speech. I would be delighted if the foreign affairs minister could provide some of the answers by the end of my 20 minute speech or perhaps in questions and comments.

Government Orders

It is quite clear on the record that the Conservatives are in favour of the mission, of course, and the motion. Almost everyone is trying to work together to reach a positive deal out of this Parliament, but of course, as everyone knows, that requires answers to a few more questions. It would make it simple and easier.

I will outline those questions again so the government is quite clear on what they are. Maybe the answers are already being prepared. If so, perhaps the minister could make that clear to us and I would not be so worried.

First, when will the government notify NATO of the end date in 2011? That is what we have agreed to, but when is NATO going to be told so that it can get on with its planning, which is one of the very big strengths of this proposition that we are putting forward?

Second, why was there a change in the end date from February 2011 to July 2011? It is not a huge difference in time, but we are talking about millions of dollars that could be spent by Canada or another NATO ally that goes in. What was the purpose of that change in those months, which would change so much for the Canadian taxpayer? It may not change the mission, but it obviously has a rationale. We just would like to know what the rationale is.

Third, I hope there is also a rationale for why the government chose 1,000 as the number of additional troops needed in the area. Once again, we are not just picking numbers from a hat. This is very serious and important. It needs a very detailed analysis. We would like the government to give us an answer on why the number of 1,000 was chosen. If there is a reason but we cannot be given the particular answers, that would be fine, but there are not even reasons at the moment. I am sure the answers are being prepared so that we can get on with finalizing what we are working on together.

Fourth, what was the timeframe for meeting the conditions with respect to new troops and equipment, i.e., when will we be able to say that the condition has not been met? There is a condition in the motion. We would like the new troops and equipment, of course, but when is the deadline? When do they have to be there? Once again, when are we going to inform NATO so that a rational plan can be developed?

Fifth and last, regarding detainees, what is Canada doing to ensure that we are in compliance with our international obligations? We have asked this before. It is not a difficult question. Hopefully there is a good plan in place. I know that the government has had significant problems in this area, but I am sure it is working on a plan.

Just to be clear, I will repeat the questions once again. First, when will the government notify NATO of the end date in 2011? Second, why did the government change the end date from February 2011 to July 2011? Third, why has it chosen 1,000 as the number of additional troops? Fourth, what is the timeframe for meeting the conditions with respect to new troops and equipment and when will we be able to say the condition has not been met? Last, what is Canada doing to ensure that we are in compliance with our international obligations related to the detainees?

As I have mentioned before, I visited our troops in Afghanistan. I wanted to make sure they had everything they needed. We were all very proud of the work they were doing, of course, and those I spoke

with were very proud of the mission they were undertaking at the time and what they were doing to help people who could not help themselves. I am a member of the Legion, of course, and show my support often.

I also am proud of the aid that Canada is providing there and in many other countries. We visited a provincial reconstruction team. People should not let anyone fool them: in dangerous areas, we need some protection for aid at times.

• (2255)

The area we visited looked like an old western fort protected by the military, but in that community, children were once again going to school. Girls were going to school. Aid was being provided. However, it could not have been provided if there had not been protection there. In fact, at the very spot where we landed, a few months later there was an assassination attempt on the president when he landed there. It is indeed dangerous and there are times when security is required.

Before I go on, I have to make a correction to the speech I was making before dinner. I said that the Taliban had attacked the World Trade Center. It was not actually the Taliban. It was al-Qaeda, but of course it was being allowed to develop its terrorist camps in the Taliban-run government.

In recent years, as members know, we were very proud that we got another mandate under the United Nations, which is the responsibility to protect. All Canadians and all parliamentarians here should be very proud of that, because basically it says that the United Nations can intervene if a country is not defending its own citizens.

This will certainly improve the mandate of the United Nations in a very important way, because we have situations in the world today where totalitarian governments and dictatorships are basically slaughtering, raping, displacing or putting into forced labour their own citizens, with no efforts to protect them. Their allies, their friends, can say to the world that the United Nations cannot intervene because the only way the United Nations can intervene is if there is not regional but international upheaval or instability, and of course then it is just a domestic matter. There are countries that say that today.

However, under the responsibility to protect, those countries are not protecting their own citizens. In the examples the minister gave a few minutes ago, where the Taliban are killing or raping people, or agents of their government are, or people who are allowed to operate in their area are, or where teachers are being murdered for teaching girls, or members of parliament are being murdered, as was talked about this afternoon, then obviously no one would agree that the government was protecting its own citizens. It would be agreed that international intervention is obviously now warranted, is now possible legally and is obviously an objective to which very few in the civilized world would object.

As we know from the wife of the Afghanistan ambassador to Canada, women were not allowed to work under the Taliban. They were not allowed to attend school or pursue an education. They were not allowed to receive medical care from a male doctor. They were basically non-citizens without rights or representation.

Government Orders

All these things I have just described, and that others have described, of course are totally foreign to Canadian values. That is why NATO and the United Nations are in support of actions to help the Afghan people.

I found it very unbelievable when a speaker just stated that we were not there in Canada's strategic interest. In my opinion, of course, that could not possibly be true. Is not defending human rights in Canada's strategic interest?

Is not allowing girls to go back to school in Canada's strategic interest? Is not protecting the people who are feeding poor children in Canada's strategic interest? Is not trying to give women equality of rights not in Canada's strategic interest? Is not trying to provide democracy and the opportunity to choose to people under the thumb of a horrible, religious zealot dictatorship not in Canada's strategic interest? I think it is.

I want to devote the rest of my comments to trying to lobby for a balancing of Canadian resources under the three Ds, defence, development and diplomacy, as the Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation has said, in giving some areas where Canadian diplomacy could be increased and could be very helpful.

● (2300)

As members will recall, before dinner I was talking about how poor the people are in Afghanistan. I was talking about the shack with the dirt floor. It was cold like our winter is, with snow, and there was barely a piece of wood to light the fire. It is a desert. There are no trees in a lot of areas, so where would people even get wood?

People like that would not be choosing who governs them based on some political or philosophical discussion. They are looking at survival. It is not the Taliban's or the democrat's political position they will be voting for. They will be voting for who can put food on the table, help keep them warm in winter, help feed their children, help them survive and help them make an awful life a little better.

It is not an easy task. It is very expensive. As we know, we have spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to eradicate poverty in Canada. We have not been totally successful. It is not an inexpensive task.

If we try to change the workforce, once again, it is a very expensive task. In Canada, of course, some people have hoped for years that we could provide equally lucrative employment for tobacco growers and asbestos workers. These are very tiny portions of Canada's workforce, but we have not been successful to date. It could be a somewhat expensive proportion.

However, let us imagine trying to change a whole huge chunk of the Canadian workforce. It would be almost inconceivable for us. Yet in Afghanistan, so many people are not working at productive jobs. Once again, this is a very admirable goal, but let us not underestimate the economic requirements.

The problem is that we cannot make sufficient progress in those other areas if our resources are dedicated 10 times more to defence than development. If we are to make more progress in those other areas, we have to provide more in the development area for this huge task that I have just outlined.

Force alone, as much as I have outlined its important purposes, will never be the total answer. As I am sure all parliamentarians here know, we cannot beat someone into voting for us or convince them by force of what is right to have the final, long term, peaceful solution we need.

As many here know, I am very upset, as we all are, about the situation in Burma. One just wants to go in immediately with force. However, if we read the book by Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratically elected leader of Burma and Nobel Peace Prize winner who is under house arrest, which is absolutely absurd, she is lobbying not for the force that we are itching to put in, but for a peaceful solution. Her argument is that if we use force it shows that the winning way, the way to solve a problem, is just who has the biggest army. If it were to be replaced, the opposition would just get a bigger military force, and that is not the answer she wants there.

I want to talk for a minute about rotation. When Canadian geese make their long migration, it is obviously a strenuous, difficult and trying situation under very hard conditions over thousands of miles. Injuries are involved. The hardest role is that of the leader in front of the V, in finding the way and starting the motion. In a flock of geese, that position is exchanged. The goose in front is replaced by one from the back. They take turns leading and sharing that role in which they are under attack by the elements all the time. They share the leading role.

● (2305)

That is the same philosophy that NATO goes under, that different countries will assume the role in the front lines and rotate through the difficult positions as they all work in a team to solve a common objective.

Huge numbers of Canadians, as I am sure all members of Parliament know, think it is time because Canadians have done their spot in the lead of the V, at the front of the attack. It is time for our numerous other NATO allies to fill in for a while, so our people can have a rest and do the important development that will win the hearts and minds of those people who will have to build a democracy for themselves.

Our Canadian troops have to train the Afghan people because their future is in their hands. The training of their police and military by our forces is where the solution has to lie. Canada is a great example of self-government. The success that has for people is reflected when they finally take over their own future.

It is not that Canada does not have other challenges in the world. When the war in Afghanistan is taken care of and the Afghan people are in control of their lives, defending themselves and providing for their people, there are all sorts of challenges around the world where we can be generous with our armed forces, our economic aid, our food aid and our humanitarian aid. There are places such as Burma, Darfur and the Congo. There are a multitude of problems in Africa that are crying for this type of intervention. There will always be work to be done.

Government Orders

Finally, I would close by saying why I think the solution that the Liberals have lobbied so hard for is being accepted by many people. First of all, the government originally appeared to be in a never ending war with no deadline. The Conservatives decided to look at 2011 and what could be done at that time. That was one way of operating, but I do not think it was acceptable to Canadians.

I think Canadians have to be very clear that what the Liberals pushed for and have achieved is an end date in 2011. In fact, the military commitment and the fighting that people are objecting to will end in 2009 and that is not changing. It will not occur after that in spite of what we heard earlier tonight.

I think what we have is a very positive solution. Canadians will be doing to a large extent the training and development that is needed to succeed in an overall balanced effort that I think we are all in support of.

When President Kennedy set a goal of having a person on the moon by the end of the decade, I think that is what led to the American success, having an actual end date and a specific time. People did a lot more work because they had that objective.

It will inspire our NATO allies to come up with a plan so that the innocent are not left unprotected in their time of need, when they are on the cusp of taking care of themselves. In that way I think the objective that we all want, which is a free, autonomous, self-protecting and self-nurturing democracy for the people of Afghanistan, will be available to all of us.

• (2310)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found myself agreeing with much of what my colleague had to say.

He referenced the previous speaker and the fact that he felt that it was very much in Canada's strategic interest to be there. He went on to discuss some of the very real contributions that are being made, not the least of which is in keeping with the values and principles Canada is projecting in Afghanistan.

The previous speaker, of course, spoke of pathetic. What is pathetic are some of these pedantic, professorial, preaching or pseudo-intellectual remarks and then slinking out of the chamber, but I digress.

I want to come back to the hon. member's questions that he posed to the government, questions that we have heard and I believe we have answered throughout this debate and at various times in the chamber in question period.

With respect to public notification, NATO follows very closely the goings on in all NATO member countries. I have had numerous occasions to speak to Secretary General "Jaap" De Hoop Scheffer about the debate that has transpired here. Clearly, we want to wait until this motion has been dealt with by way of a vote. At that time Canada's intentions will be very public.

With respect to the end date of December 2011 versus July 2011, this is also in keeping with the issue of notification and allowing for the troop replacement that might be necessary in such an instance.

That is the difference of the six months in the July versus December determination.

With respect to the 1,000 troops, that number was arrived at in keeping with the recommendations of the Manley report. The Manley panel consultations involved speaking with military and civilian experts to determine that in Kandahar province the equivalent of a manoeuvre battalion or battle group, which is roughly 700 to 1,000 troops, would be required to stabilize the military effort. In this instance we are seeing an additional 2,000 American marines coming to Kandahar province beginning this month.

Looking at the issues of equipment and troop contributions as to when that will take effect, the original commitment and the wording in the motion references February 2009. That would be the time in which we would have to achieve those levels of additional support in both equipment and troops.

Finally, with respect to compliance, we are talking about meeting these elements to achieve what we feel will be further security around this mission to provide for greater humanitarian aid work, greater reconstruction on the ground, and greater development. All of this being the total government approach that is being taken with respect to Afghanistan.

• (2315)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's answers. We are in an environment in the House where we often do not get answers to questions. The minister answered directly and I am very positive about what he said.

I just want to confirm some of his answers to my questions because they were the most important part of my speech and I think the only major stumbling block left.

I asked the minister when the government was going to notify NATO? The minister said it will be public knowledge when we have the vote. I assume the government, for official purposes, would then transfer that public knowledge to NATO in an official format right after the decision.

I asked the minister why we changed the end date from February 2011 to July 2011. The minister gave a very rational answer about the need for replacement troops and the timetable of troop movement, which he would know better than I.

I asked why 1,000 troops were chosen. Once again the minister gave a very positive and reflective answer. The number came from the Manley report, and I hope an analysis was done.

My fourth question dealt with the timeframe for meeting conditions. If NATO had not come up with the troops or the equipment, when would we say that conditions were not met? The minister answered directly by saying February 2009.

I did not catch the total answer to the very last question. What is Canada doing to ensure we are in compliance with our international obligations? The minister might have answered it, but I just did not hear it. If he could repeat it, it would be wonderful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will allow the hon. Minister of National Defence a short reply.

Government Orders

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, very briefly, complying with international obligations is of course always a focal point of a mission such as this.

When it comes to the issue of detainees, Taliban prisoners, we have actually increased our visits. We have ensured that in keeping with both the spirit and the letter of the enhanced agreement that was signed between Canada and the government of Afghanistan, we communicate as clearly and as often as necessary, and as is humanly possible, to the Afghans their obligations under that arrangement.

These increased visits include such things as embarking upon more intense training around interrogation methods. These efforts are being made within the penal system to raise their capacity and this is happening at a much more rigorous pace.

Just like all of the other levels within the mission, we are putting a great deal of emphasis on seeing that both Afghanistan, and of course Canada, are meeting those international obligations.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the member for Yukon and his support for the motion in front of us. I would like him to comment on the position of the Bloc and the New Democratic Party. Sometimes it is useful to look at the opposite position, to try to substantiate and support our own position on this motion.

The NDP and the Bloc are both calling for the immediate and unilateral withdrawal of all of our military from Afghanistan. It follows from that position that one of two things will happen.

We either withdraw all of our military from Afghanistan immediately, along with all of our diplomats and our development aid workers, and return to this policy of isolationism that many nation states in the 19th century held, which I posit is a false security and a false sense of security, or the NDP and the Bloc are calling for the unilateral and immediate withdrawal of all of our military from Afghanistan, but would allow our diplomats and our development aid workers to remain in Afghanistan.

In my view, that would naively lead to the complete slaughter of many innocent people, both Afghan and Canadian, in that theatre.

Could the member for Yukon comment on the position that some of the parties have in this House with respect to this motion, namely the position that we should unilaterally and immediately withdraw all of our military from the Afghanistan theatre?

• (2320)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I am only going to comment on moving toward a positive solution. I would say, however, that there are a number of countries where Canada is involved that are very dangerous, where we do have aid people and diplomats, so it is not impossible to have people working in aid and to have diplomats, especially if there is other protection for them.

However, what I have not had a chance to say in either of my speeches is that I do have a number of constituents who are questioning Canada's role in Afghanistan. They are questioning why we are there. They are questioning what type of results we are getting, and they are questioning whether we could be more successful doing other activities.

Hopefully this speech and the examples that members are giving as to what is being accomplished, along with the outline I have given of the Liberal position, which I know some people who have written to me did not fully understand, will make it clearer that this is a positive solution.

Let us try to leave it at that because I think all parties in the House have to come together, behind our troops, and have a positive position. It will help the people of Afghanistan. We will not leave our Canadian Forces there for an unlimited time. Canadians do not feel that being in Afghanistan forever is the best use of our resources.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's.

I will begin my remarks by commending the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence and his parliamentary secretary, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his parliamentary secretary, as well as the House for the tremendous progress that has been made by our government since it established the independent panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan.

The independent pane, in its report of January 22, outlined the need for Canada to continue with its responsibility for security in Kandahar beyond February 2009 with increasing emphasis on training the Afghan national security forces. Since these recommendations were made, our government has achieved a bipartisan consensus and has taken action to secure to the 1,000 additional troops required. I expect Canada will argue its case strongly before the upcoming NATO conference.

I am proud to stand before the House tonight to speak in support of a motion that responds directly to the recommendations outlined by the Manley panel and that will ensure the future success of Canada's mission to Afghanistan.

I am proud that the House recognizes that we must fulfill our obligations, our international obligations, yes, but also our obligations toward the Afghan people and toward our men and women in uniform.

Our government realizes the importance of the Afghan mission in terms of Canada's international reputation and obligations. The mission has put Canada at the forefront of international diplomacy and capacity building like no mission in recent memory, and it has done so in a truly international context.

Canada is in Afghanistan as part of the United Nations mandated and NATO led International Security Assistance Force, a force of some 43,250 troops from 38 countries, countries like Jordan, Switzerland, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and Romania. While we are ready to fulfill our international obligations, we recognize the necessity to share the burden with our allies.

The Manley report noted that our commitment to stay past 2009 should be contingent on the assignment of an additional battle group of about 1,000 soldiers to Kandahar by our allies. We fully endorse this recommendation and believe this increase is necessary if we want to improve effectiveness on the ground.

Government Orders

The Prime Minister and other key members of the government have been actively working on securing additional troops as reinforcements in Kandahar. I believe that our allies understand that for NATO to be successful, some of our partners will need to make those additional commitments in Kandahar and elsewhere.

The foreign ministers meeting in Brussels last week was a crucial stage toward a partnership in Kandahar and we are looking forward to next month's Bucharest summit where further advances will be consolidated.

Our commitment to the international community is central but it is more than a commitment toward our allies. We must not forget why we are in Afghanistan in the first place. Afghanistan has suffered decades of conflict, destruction and poverty. The international alliance is establishing the conditions in which Afghanistan can enjoy self-sustaining peace and security.

Last week we had the honour of hosting six Afghan women parliamentarians on an official visit to Canada. The House receives many distinguished visitors but what set last week's dignitaries apart is that their visit would not have been possible only a few years ago. Now Afghan women are part of representative, democratic government. They have access to health care and education in numbers never seen before.

The International Security Assistance Force is helping establish a safer and more stable environment that is allowing roads, hospitals and schools to be built and other development work to take place. These gains are encouraging but Afghan people must receive the additional support needed to consolidate these advances and bring them to an even greater portion of the population.

Canada plays no small role in these advances and in this consolidation. Our troops are in a region where much progress has been made but where more needs to be done to bring security, stability and better livelihoods. To pull Canadian troops out of Afghanistan in 2009, or worse, as early as right now as members opposite have suggested, would be an easy way out in the face of adversity. That is not the Canadian way. Imagine if we had pulled out in World War I or World War II or if we threw up our arms at Juno Beach or the Battle Britain or on Vimy Ridge.

Our government believes that we cannot let the Afghan people down and we will not let them down.

Our third fundamental obligation is to our men and women in uniform who believe in their mission. They were asked by politicians of both parties in 2001 to take part in this difficult but extremely important mission.

● (2325)

Since the first major Canadian deployment in early 2002, more than 15,000 Canadian troops have been stationed and rotated through Afghanistan. Every day Canadian men and women are putting their lives on the line for all of us. They believe in the mission and in what they are doing for the Afghan people, and so does this government. This is why we have taken concrete measures to support our troops.

The Prime Minister announced last month that the government has decided to set aside stable and predictable funding for our Canadian

forces by increasing the automatic annual increase in defence spending from 1.5% to 2%. This funding, together with new and upgraded equipment, will improve the general effectiveness and safety of our troops.

Support for our troops goes well beyond funding and equipment. It requires that we give our troops the opportunity to continue the important work they have been doing and to continue this work without interference from third parties.

I commend the Liberal Party for respecting the operational decisions of our military leadership in Afghanistan who are best placed to understand the needs and tactics to succeed. Our government has always been a strong advocate of this kind of independence and we believe that operational decisions should be left to Canadian commanders on the ground in Afghanistan.

The military mission is, of course, only one component of the 3D strategy. Our diplomatic and development gains also have been numerous. For example, Canadian assistance has supported skills development in the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's office, the Minister of Justice, including training for judges, prosecutors, public defenders and court administrators, as well as setting up legal aid programming.

Canada is working to strengthen the Afghan national police and improve the prison system so that the new Afghanistan can effectively police its own population and bring law and order back to the country and people can feel safe in their communities. This also includes a recent \$1 million investment to upgrade prison facilities.

In early 2007, Canada announced a \$20 million contribution to the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan which helps pay Afghan national police salaries. Canada's total contribution to the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan is nearly \$30 million and has paid the salaries of nearly 65,000 Afghan national police members and their staff. Canada has contributed over \$50 million to the national solidarity program, nearly 20,000 community development councils have been elected nationwide and over 30,000 projects have been approved by these councils to date.

Those are just some of the gains made in the last six years. I am sure with more effort and with the passing of this motion, Afghanistan will see many more.

We cannot forget the many gains made for women. Women now have health care, education, they can vote and, as we saw last week, they are sitting in parliament. This is a gain we are staying for and a gain worth fighting for.

Government Orders

As a father of three daughters, I want to see women around the world, especially in Afghanistan, have the same opportunities, rights and privileges that my daughters have.

I would like to congratulate this House once again for achieving a bipartisan consensus on the future of this mission. We have recognized that we cannot and will not abandon our obligations. The Afghanistan mission is important enough in terms of Canada's international reputation and obligations and in terms of the obligations we have taken toward the Afghan people and, of course, to our men and women in uniform.

I urge all members to vote in favour of this motion that will bring greater coherence and effectiveness to Canada's efforts.

● (2330)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's comments were right on the mark. I wonder if he would expand a little bit on Canada's place in the world. What we are doing in Afghanistan is obviously very important and it is setting an example for other nations to follow.

Would the member care to comment on the leadership that this Prime Minister and this government are showing to the world, how that might benefit Canada's standing in the world overall and how it might benefit the world in giving the world more of Canada?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that Canada's reputation abroad has expanded dramatically over the last number of years since we joined the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. People now take us seriously when we talk about matters that are important to them.

I look at what happened in Lebanon and how our Minister of Foreign Affairs was invited to be part of the peace process to talk about how to bring about some resolution there. I think 10 years ago that would not have happened but people now see us as being a leader on international affairs.

Our Prime Minister moved very quickly in the condemnation of the different terrorist groups that are out there, like Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Countries are serious about downplaying and getting rid of all this terrorist activism around the world and bringing about real peace and security. They are turning to Canada for our ideas and for what we can do to not only bring aid and development to those countries, but to help them with the peace resolution process.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the parliamentary secretary's reference to Canada's leadership role and the heavy lifting, so to speak, that we have done, not only in Afghanistan but in other parts of the world, and his reference to our recent efforts to evacuate Canadians from Lebanon during a very volatile period of time, it does demonstrate that in the last two years we have seen a reinvigorated Canada.

We have seen the Canadian military, in particular, given not only the necessary equipment and financial resources and support, but the respect that is certainly afforded our men and women in uniform and a degree of gratitude and outward expressions of appreciation that

we have not seen, certainly I have not seen in my lifetime nor, I suspect, have you, Mr. Speaker.

My colleague from Edmonton, who spent a good part of his life representing the Canadian Forces, being a person of considerable ability, intelligence and intellect going into the Canadian Forces and dedicating his life to that cause, speaks from a very unique vantage point when he talks about the transformation that has occurred in the last few years in particular. This is something that showers those men and women with the glory and with the necessary outward expressions of appreciation and affection that is due to their effort, particularly given the enormity of the role they are playing in Afghanistan today.

I wonder if my colleague would note the same thing in his community, with red rallies, with sporting events and just people on the street passing soldiers and airmen and airwomen in the airports, when they see them in uniform, when they see an opportunity to express their thanks, that appears to be happening in abundance. It is long overdue and is something that our country can be proud of. We are seeing people every day in small towns and big cities embracing that important role played by Canadian men and women in uniform.

● (2335)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of National Defence and our Prime Minister for letting the world know that Canada is back. We are back in a major way on the foreign stage and people appreciate that we bring our own special ability to the negotiating table when these major discussions are taking place, whether it is at NATO, at the UN or at special conferences on the future of Middle East peace.

My riding borders a military base in Winnipeg and many soldiers and airmen and airwomen live in my riding. Every time I see them they always want to stop and say "thank you for respecting us, thank you for giving us the equipment to do our jobs and thank you for taking our training very seriously".

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to speak in favour of the motion. It is very much a testament to the government's global commitment to help people in need to build better lives for themselves. Moreover, it is a testament to the government's willingness to adapt to new challenges.

One of the points of the Manley report said that what needed improvement was the government's communication to Canadians about the mission in Afghanistan. As the Prime Minister has said, it will never be easy to communicate an issue which involves the sacrifice of our brave soldiers. Nonetheless, openness and improved communication is important. Canadians deserve to understand why we make the sacrifices that being a good global citizen requires and in some ways this is simply a matter of respect for our citizens.

Government Orders

It is also a matter of respect for our soldiers, especially the brave men and women in uniform who did not return home from Afghanistan. In particular, I would like to mention two of those soldiers.

Private Richard Green was killed in Afghanistan on April 17, 2002. He was 21 years old and with the 3rd Battalion of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. He was raised in Hubbards in my riding of South Shore—St. Margaret's.

The other soldier I would like to recognize today is Corporal Paul Davis, who was 28 years old. He was from Bridgewater, Nova Scotia and died on March 2, 2006, in Kandahar.

I do not think we can use the names of soldiers who have not returned home from Afghanistan lightly. I said that we had to use them with respect, and I meant that. I mention them with respect. Part of the government's message, what we are doing in Afghanistan and the way we are using our men and women in uniform, has to use the word "respect". Part of our debate tonight has to use the word "respect", respect for this institution, respect for the rule of law, respect for your office, Mr. Speaker, respect for other members in the chamber, respect for the other people in this debate and respect, most important, for a different point of view.

However, it is also extremely important that by respecting one another and the rules of debate, we also respect the truth. We are members of Parliament. Sometimes we blur the line. Sometimes we get crowded right up against it. Sometimes we step across it. However, there is really no excuse for rational, intelligent, respectful members of Parliament to tell an untruth in this place. That is exactly what happened with the member for Outremont this evening in his discussion about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization not being a defensive organization.

I will take a moment in this debate to explain for the general public, which may be listening and may have believed the hon. member's comments as being truthful. The North Atlantic Treaty states:

The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments.

This is a defensive organization with peaceful designs that uses the threat of force in the last possible instance. Article 1 states:

The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

● (2340)

That is pretty clear. I do not think there is too much debate over that. I do not know how someone could take that charter and somehow say it is something different from what it is.

I am not going to belabour this too much further, but article 2 states:

The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.

I think that puts the issue to rest, I really do. I do not think there is any room for a lot more debate on NATO somehow being an aggressive force that is running hell-bent around the country trying to cause havoc and to wreak havoc in the countries of the world.

Before I continue my speech, there is another comment that I would like to make about this debate, which one of my colleagues mentioned earlier tonight, and it is about some of the rallies for the troops that have been occurring.

As you would know, Mr. Speaker, in Atlantic Canada we certainly have in many ways a disproportionate number of the soldiers serving. They are Atlantic Canadians and we are quite proud of that fact. These young men and women, and sometimes older men and women, have found good careers in the military and have given their all to those careers.

Along with the Minister of National Defence, I was in Shelburne for a rally with the troops. It was a cold November day. It was raining and snowing. A good group of us walked a few blocks in some inclement weather. We were not nearly as cold as the RCMP pipes and drums band, whose members were there in their kilts, and we did make it to the fire hall.

There were over 600 people crowded into that fire hall. There were nine veterans from Shelburne County who had served in Afghanistan on the stage with us. There were more men and women who were in Afghanistan at the time or who were in transit one way or another from that area. It was a true testament to Atlantic Canada and to our Canadian men and women in uniform.

This motion that we are debating today will help better communicate to Canadians the successes we are having in Afghanistan and how to move forward on the challenges. In fact, the government has taken the bold step of engaging an independent and non-partisan panel on Canada's future in Afghanistan.

Who would ever have thunk it? Who would ever have thought that? We say that a bit tongue in cheek, but in all honesty, for a sitting government to form an independent panel on an issue as critical to the country as this issue, and then be prepared to listen to that independent panel, who would have thought it?

Government Orders

It totally befuddles me as to how every party in the House cannot be in agreement with what that independent panel found. The Manley panel is to be commended in particular for laying out an excellent strategic and moral case for why we are in Afghanistan. More than that, Mr. Manley and his colleagues have laid a path to success that the government has fully accepted.

I am personally grateful for their work and I look forward to the fruits that it will bear. We mandated the panel to release a public report. This is not some secret report shown to the Minister of National Defence, a few of his close personal allies and the Prime Minister. It is a public report that every member in the House has had an opportunity to read to prepare themselves for the debate this evening and the one tomorrow evening. It was extensively reported in the media and discussed by experts across the country.

I have one minute left and I do not know what to do with the minute. A minute is not a whole lot of time in this place. However, I will finish up by saying that I believe this debate was good for our country and Canadians responded favourably to the conclusions. That is why we are here discussing this motion. It is to implement many of the report's recommendations.

This is a difficult issue for many people. No member of Parliament takes his or her job more seriously than when voting to extend the mission in Afghanistan, as we will be doing again.

● (2345)

Our government was the first government to allow full and open debate on this issue, and it was a victory for democracy to do that.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's comments very much. He mentioned the disproportionate number of Atlantic Canadians who are part of the Canadian Forces, and they should be very proud of that.

I would like to take a moment to mention Trooper Michael Hayakaze, who was the Canadian brought home last week to the loving arms of his family and the arms of a grateful nation. Trooper Hayakaze was from the Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) from Edmonton, a unit with which I am forming a special bond. That unit's motto is "Perseverance". I suggest that perseverance is what Canadians and Canada need to show in the mission in Afghanistan to get the job done and get it done right.

I would like to ask my colleague for his comments on not just the Atlantic Canadians but some of the Canadians of other origins. Trooper Hayakaze is a Japanese Canadian. I would like my colleague's comments on the contribution that Canadians of all ethnic origins are making in this current conflict and in the Canadian Forces and Canada in general.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do recognize the contribution and the supreme sacrifice that Trooper Hayakaze made on behalf of the Canadian people and for the people of Afghanistan. We should not allow that sacrifice to be wasted, quite frankly. We have an obligation to stay the course for the long term, not for the short term, and to make sure that Afghanistan returns to a peaceful, democratic and truly open country that it is very capable of being.

In respect to the 80 men and women, Canadian soldiers and diplomats, who have died in Afghanistan, there was no vote that I

have ever taken in this House that was more difficult than the first vote on the mission in Afghanistan. There was no question in my mind how I would vote. I knew how I would vote at home. I knew that when my grandfather served in World War I and when my father served in World War II there was a reason for that and I knew the vote I would take. I do not think any man or woman in this place stood and voted for the mission in Afghanistan without knowing the very real, very urgent danger that we put our men and women in uniform in. For that I have nothing but respect for those soldiers, sailors and airmen.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's for his support of this motion.

It is important to remind Canadians why we are in Afghanistan. We are in Afghanistan to ensure that a government friendly to organizations like al-Qaeda does not re-establish itself and provide a safe haven to allow those organizations to train, to plan their attacks, to threaten our interests here in Canada. That is the reason we are engaged in Afghanistan.

It is also equally important to remind Canadians that the very province in which we are presently engaged, Kandahar province, is the province from which the Taliban rose in the early 1990s, after the Soviets had left, to take over the government of Afghanistan and establish their own very brutal and totalitarian form of government. We are not only in Afghanistan to protect our interests, we are in fact in that region in Afghanistan from which our interests had been so seriously challenged during the events of 2001. That is the reason we are there, and I think everything else, frankly, is secondary. That is why it is important that Canada stay the course.

As I mentioned before, any other party who suggests that we can unilaterally withdraw from Afghanistan, unilaterally withdraw our military from Afghanistan and be consistent with Canada's engagement multilaterally and otherwise in the world, and be consistent with Canada's commitment to development and diplomacy, I think, is completely naive.

● (2350)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I think a unilateral withdrawal would be a travesty of the worst proportions. We would leave the Afghans wide open. If Canada withdrew and other nations withdrew, we would leave them wide open to external forces. It would be an absolute bloodbath.

Let me take the last 15 seconds to look at why we are there. When I listen to the Bloc or the NDP speak about this, they would have us think that no Canadian citizens died in the twin towers. In reality, Canadians did die. That was not just an attack against the United States. It was an attack against many countries of the world. It was an attack against democracy and everything that Canada stands for and has stood for since 1867.

Surely, if we are going to stand for anything, if we are going to fight for anything, then we are going to fight for freedom and democracy on this planet.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at midnight.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Unfortunately, because of an order due earlier we cannot seek a request for unanimous consent, but if there are no further members rising, we can accomplish the same goal.

Resuming debate. There being no further members rising, pursuant to order made Thursday, March 6, 2008, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 11:53 p.m.)

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