



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 17, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 17, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1355)

[English]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

SARNIA BUILDING TRADES

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the honour to attend a very special graduation ceremony in my riding, a ceremony that does not occur anywhere else in the province of Ontario.

The Sarnia Construction Association and the Sarnia Building Trades Council worked together to honour 88 graduates of the apprenticeship program. There were graduate electricians, pipefitters, plumbers, millwrights, boilermakers, bricklayers, sheet metal workers, carpenters, labourers, and operating engineers.

As well as honouring these graduates, the two groups have worked diligently to have training provided at our local community college. As a result, those seeking training as steamfitters, carpenters and electricians can now access that training locally, thus keeping our local youth in the community.

This is a huge success story in my riding. I am proud to pay tribute on a job well done to the graduating apprentices, the Sarnia Construction Association and the Sarnia Building Trades Council.

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CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak on behalf of one of my constituents, Master Warrant Officer James Tolmie, who has served this country for the past 33 years as a member of the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Tolmie has expressed his sadness and disappointment in the government's decision not to fly the flags at half-mast for the fallen soldiers in Afghanistan. He feels as though our government owes this gesture of respect to all the men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty while serving our country. I would agree.

I would like to recognize all the members of the Canadian Forces who have served and who are presently serving our country and to let them know that this House honours their commitment and respects the great contributions that they have made at home and abroad.

We are grateful and we are indebted to them.

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[Translation]

SISTER ANNETTE BELLAVANCE

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge Sister Annette Bellavance of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, who was principal of Collège Regina Assumpta for 35 years. This educational institution is located in the heart of my riding, Ahuntsic.

As the members may recall, in March 2005, Sister Annette received an eloquent tribute during a ceremony organized by the Ahuntsic Cartierville Business People's Association, which also gave her an award for her community involvement.

On May 21, she will participate in the closing ceremonies of Collège Regina Assumpta's 50th anniversary celebration during a reunion of the college's alumni, teachers and staff members.

I would like to wish Sister Annette a happy reunion and to thank her for her devotion.

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[English]

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today to congratulate our sisters and brothers in the Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Union of Canada on their historic pay equity settlement with Bell Canada. These 4,700 telephone operators, dining service and house service workers, almost all women, bravely and patiently brought pay equity to the forefront of the struggle for equality for women workers in Canada.

Statements by Members

CEP took on this fight in 1992, when women earned 30% less than their male counterparts. This victory, a \$104 million pay equity settlement, is a victory for all women in this country, but let us not forget that two years ago the former Liberal government released a pay equity report recommending new legislation to protect equal pay for work of equal value. Yet nothing has been done.

The NDP joins in solidarity with our sisters in CEP and the women across Canada to call on this government to immediately implement the recommendations of the pay equity task force. Justice delayed is justice denied.

* * *

● (1405)

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Parliament will debate and vote on extending our mission in Afghanistan. With that in mind, I am pleased to congratulate a Calgary constituent on the release of his heroic documentary highlighting the value of Canada's efforts in Afghanistan and the progress that is being made every day. After nearly three decades of reporting on Afghanistan, journalist Arthur Kent has returned to document Canada's military mission in the war-ravaged country.

Recently I was fortunate to attend a screening of his new film, *Afghanistan: Peacemaking In Progress*. The documentary, independently financed and produced by this Emmy award winning filmmaker, takes audiences on patrol with Canadian General David Fraser and his troops. Kent also reunites with Afghans he filmed during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, including two inspiring individuals now serving in President Hamid Karzai's cabinet.

The film serves as a testament to Canadians deployed in Afghanistan and a tribute and inspiration to the people of Afghanistan and those brave Canadians who serve to restore their freedom.

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POVERTY

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a recent Statistics Canada report contains some very good news for Canadians. That news was contained in some typically technical statistics that measure poverty and for the most part seems to have gone unnoticed by this House and the public. I should give some credit to the *Globe and Mail* for shining some light on this in an editorial.

First, the number of children living in poor families declined between 1996 and 2004 from 1.3 million to 865,000, a huge reduction of 33%.

Second, the proportion of families living below the poverty line has declined from 12.1% to 8.5% over the same period.

These huge improvements are the result of a strong economy, more jobs and increased transfer payments from governments. There is still poverty and there is still much more work to do, but this is still real progress that all Canadians, all parties in this House and anti-poverty advocates can celebrate.

This shows that government can make a big difference in improving the lives of Canadians, just as this House was seeking when it passed its resolution on the subject in 1990.

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CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been roughly 100 days since the Prime Minister and this Conservative government took office. We came into office promising to clean up government, to do things differently in Ottawa, respect Canadians and deliver real results for them.

In 100 days we have cut the GST by 1% and delivered a budget with tax relief for all Canadians. We have given parents the choice in child care through a universal benefit for all families. We introduced legislation that will finally get tough on criminals. We introduced the federal accountability act, a landmark document that will give Canadians a clean government. We are the first government to take a hard line on Hamas. We have given Quebec a greater voice within our Confederation. We have settled the softwood lumber dispute and negotiated a new long term agreement.

We have accomplished more in 100 short days than the previous government did in 13 long years, and we will continue to deliver for all Canadians.

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[*Translation*]

SEAL HUNT

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Friday I had the opportunity to participate in a meeting in Paris of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the seal hunt was on the agenda.

Several of the European MPs were against it, and I found that their opinions were based on false information. The Conservative government must rectify this situation before it is too late.

That said, in light of the importance of this industry for communities of the Magdalen Islands, the North Shore and Newfoundland and Labrador, why did the federal government not send a representative to this significant meeting? Despite the fact that this industry could lead to a boycott by European countries, the federal government did not send a delegate. This is unacceptable.

If the Conservative government supports Quebec and Canada's seal industry, it should send a representative to the next meeting of the committee on June 9 in Paris.

Statements by Members

•(1410)
[English]

HONDA CANADA

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand up today on behalf of Canada's new government to help celebrate Honda Canada's announcement of investing \$154 million for a new engine plant in Alliston located in my riding of Simcoe—Grey. The investment will create 340 new jobs, as well as many additional spinoff jobs and other economic benefits. This is tremendous news not only for Alliston and New Tecumseth, but for Canada and the entire Canadian automotive industry and its dedicated workers.

Honda has been a tremendous corporate citizen, enjoying a worldwide reputation for tremendous quality and continuous innovation. 2006 marks the 20th anniversary of Honda vehicle production in Canada. I cannot think of a better way to celebrate the anniversary than for Honda to announce a new engine plant, new investment and new jobs in Alliston.

Today's great news is a strong sign of competence in Canada and in Canadian workers. With the recent budget delivered by Canada's new government, we are showing that Canada is open for business and ready to compete on the global market.

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MUSICFEST CANADA

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome to our nation's capital both the Regina High School Jazz Band and the Herdman Collegiate Stage Band. These young men and women from Corner Brook, Newfoundland are participating in the 34th annual MusicFest Canada program here in Ottawa.

The Regina High School Stage Band earned this special honour by its performance at the Atlantic Band Festival in Halifax, and having already performed here in Ottawa, has been awarded a gold standard performance by MusicFest Canada organizers.

The Herdman Collegiate Jazz Band attended the provincial competition in St. John's some time ago and was awarded a gold placement as well, which qualified the band to participate in MusicFest 2006. It too is up to the challenge of a gold standard performance here in Ottawa.

Congratulations to music directors Mr. Floyd Thomas and Mr. Darren White and to both of these very talented bands that they direct. I am very proud of their accomplishments.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we witnessed the sad spectacle of the opposition parties turning a parliamentary committee into a kangaroo court to shamefully slur the reputation of Canada's most respected business leader. Gwyn Morgan recently retired as head of EnCana, one of Canada's largest and most successful companies, where he capped off a sterling 35 year professional record by being voted Canada's top CEO by his peers.

Universally lauded for his integrity and community service, Mr. Morgan had agreed to serve as the founding chairman of the Public Appointments Commission for \$1 a year to help depoliticize the government appointment process. But the opposition did not want Canada's top CEO offering his services for \$1 a year and the Liberals certainly did not like the idea of a transparent professional appointment process, so they organized a sordid lynching of Mr. Morgan's reputation, outrageously contorting two lines from one speech in a 40 year career to imply that Mr. Morgan was a "racist".

This odious drive-by smear was used to justify the opposition's predetermined outcome. It says a lot more about the opposition than it does about Gwyn Morgan.

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CHILD CARE

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Victoria hundreds of people gathered in front of the legislature. On a weekday afternoon, parents, child care workers and dedicated citizens took time from their work and busy lives to show their frustration and disappointment with the Conservative government.

Their message was plain: The Conservative plan for child care is empty and unrealistic. Their signs said it all: "Mr. Harper, I have \$100. Will you care for my child?"

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member knows that she cannot refer to hon. members by name. I am sure that the hon. member was referring to the Prime Minister, I would judge from the sound of the name.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

"Mr. Prime Minister, I have \$100. Will you care for my child?" "Find me safe child care for 70¢ an hour". "Quality child care builds quality citizens". "One hundred dollars buys a month of child care—in 1986".

My constituents are—

The Speaker: I am afraid the hon. member's time has expired.

The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my statement on the budget, I wish to welcome residents from my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham who are in Ottawa celebrating Asian Heritage Month.

Tax measures in the Conservative budget do very little to truly help my constituents.

First, the lowest tax rate for Canadians will increase to 15.5% and the basic exemption will decrease by \$200. While raising the taxes we pay, the Conservatives are implementing a GST cut that only benefits the wealthy who spend more money on luxury goods.

Oral Questions

Also, the transit tax credit of 15.5% does very little, if I may say, to benefit the transportation needs of my riding. Commuters in my riding benefit when money is pooled and goes toward such projects as light rail, subway extension and improved bus services. These are what encourage people to use the transit system, not the paltry tax cut for those that already use it.

* * *

•(1415)

[Translation]

NATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the national day against homophobia and this year's focus is a homophobia-free workplace. Recognizing this national day was a Quebec initiative, proposed by Fondation Émergence. Legal equality for homosexuals was achieved in 2005 with the right to same-sex marriage. However, further work is needed to achieve social equality for homosexual and transgender individuals.

May 17 was the date chosen to mark this event because it was on May 17, 1990 that the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. This year, more than 30 countries will organize activities to denounce homophobia all around the world, from Canada to Russia, from Turkey to Sri Lanka, and even in China.

I ask you to support this international day to fight against homophobia and to encourage our governments to implement measures to prevent this discrimination, which is similar to racism, sexism or anti-Semitism.

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NATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the past four years, May 17 has been recognized by Fondation Émergence as a national day against homophobia.

[English]

The theme of this year's campaign is fighting homophobia in the workplace and in the world of sports. All too often, gays and lesbians are victims of harassment based on their sexual orientation.

I encourage all Canadians to speak out against homophobia and to work for a better and more tolerant Canada.

[Translation]

I would also like to take advantage of this national day against homophobia to encourage the members of this House who still oppose civil marriage between same-sex partners to reflect carefully on the negative consequences of their belief.

[English]

I ask everyone to join me in support of this day.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for months the opposition parties have called for a vote on our role in

Afghanistan. Our Prime Minister has agreed to that vote. Opposition members are now playing politics with our mission in Afghanistan.

Liberal and NDP members just weeks ago supported this mission. The member for Halifax said, "It's not a question of should we be in Afghanistan. Yes, we should, we need to be, we need to be in for the long haul". The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore said, "We have got to be a party that stands for human rights everywhere, that does the tough lifting when it has to be done". And finally, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca said, "The courageous Canadians who are in this dangerous theatre must have our unequivocal and steely support. They must know that we fully support them and that their mission is critically important to Canada, Canadians and the world".

This government could not agree more. We hope that the opposition parties will keep their word, do the right thing tonight and support our men and women in uniform and their continued efforts in Afghanistan.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that members of the House will have learned that today a Canadian soldier died in Afghanistan. I would like on behalf of our party and I believe all members of the House to express our deepest sympathies to her family and friends.

[Translation]

Of course, we regret this tragic loss of life.

I would ask the Prime Minister if he would like to comment on this.

[English]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. He is correct. Today we suffered a combat casualty in Afghanistan. I have the name of a female officer who was killed in combat action against Taliban forces. I am not at liberty to release the name. The next of kin, a husband, is being notified.

These are always terrible tragedies. I do not know if this is a first female combat death. It is certainly not a first that we ever want to celebrate, but it does underscore the tremendous courage that our young men and women show in our theatre. I believe they have the right at all times to know that those of us who send them into combat stand behind their mission.

Oral Questions

●(1420)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, this House clearly expressed its wishes with regard to Canada's environmental policy. A sizeable majority of elected representatives of the Canadian people asked the Prime Minister to ensure that Canada meet the objectives established by the Kyoto protocol.

When the current Prime Minister was the opposition leader, he continually asked the government to respect the wishes of Parliament. Will he do so in this case, also?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's position has been clear for quite some time: we intend to respect our election promises.

It is unfortunate that the former government accepted targets but refused to take action to meet them. It is easy for the opposition parties to vote for sentiments. However, a government must have plans and take action. And we intend to take real action.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you and all members of the House will recall that during the previous election, the current Prime Minister assured Canadians who were concerned by the extreme views of his caucus that he be held in check by a minority Parliament. The Prime Minister wanted to work with all parties in this minority Parliament, he claimed. But the Prime Minister has no intention of respecting yesterday's vote on the environment. His commitment to accountability was jettisoned when his choice to head the appointments commission was rejected because he was one of his bagmen.

How does that give the members of the House any confidence about the consequence of tonight's vote on Afghanistan?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actions do have consequences. The vote yesterday to reject Canada's most outstanding CEO who was willing to provide his services to the Government of Canada for \$1 a year is an action that has consequences.

I can understand why the party opposite would not want to clean up the appointments process given the kind of scandals it ran when it was in office.

This party will go ahead and do the job itself.

The Speaker: I remind all hon. members that cellphones are not to be used in the Chamber. The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville has the floor.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): It was not a cellphone, Mr. Speaker.

Just two short months ago, the Prime Minister was adamant that he would not support a parliamentary vote on extending Canada's mission to Afghanistan. He said, "We are not going to have votes on commitments already made".

[Translation]

A week ago, in response to a question by the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, the Prime Minister said, "—we committed ourselves to holding votes on new commitments. We are already in Afghanistan".

Why this sudden about face by the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have long expressed the desire to hold a vote on military commitments. It is unfortunate that such a vote was not held long ago. All the parties in this House were in agreement yesterday with the vote and the procedure. Now they are starting to complain. There is no leadership over there.

●(1425)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we would ask the Prime Minister to be worthy of his office. This is an extremely serious issue. He decided all of a sudden to have a vote in this House without debate on a matter as serious in a respectable timeframe for this House. So, either he has already decided and is determined to prolong the mission however the House votes—and so the vote means nothing—or he has not decided and so the House can debate for weeks on end this very important issue.

Has he or has he not decided?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party sent our troops to Afghanistan over four years ago. It kept them there. They are there and are there for the long term. That was their decision. The Liberal Party does not need any time to decide on its position. It is the duty of the Liberal Party to support our troops in this military campaign.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the House of Commons passed a Bloc Québécois motion that calls on the government to publish, by October 15, 2006, a plan for complying with the Kyoto protocol. As leader of a minority government elected with only 36% of the vote, the Prime Minister has a duty to implement the will of the House.

Does the Prime Minister not agree that he has a duty to respect the decisions of the House?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, it is easy for an opposition party that will never be in power to say that it is easy to vote for very complex matters without a plan.

This government intends to develop a plan and take concrete action.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my mandate is just as legitimate as his.

Oral Questions

I was referring to the comments the Prime Minister made on May 11, 2005, when he said, "The government is duty bound to respect the decisions made by the House of Commons".

Am I to understand that it was easy for him to say whatever he wanted when he was on this side of the House, to say whatever he wanted during the election campaign and to do the opposite today?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, polls indicate that the Kyoto protocol is popular. I notice today that the Bloc Québécois is indicating—just today—after four years, a change in position. It is opposed to our action in Afghanistan because polls indicate that our presence there is not popular.

Independent nations need leaders, not pollsters.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is rejecting Kyoto, and his future plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could very well be a carbon copy of the Bush plan, an approach that is very attractive to the oil companies because it imposes no restrictions and relies on voluntary action.

Will the Prime Minister see reason, listen to what Canadians are telling him and, in no uncertain terms, reaffirm Canada's support for the Kyoto protocol targets?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the critic for the environment should be embarrassed about the motion that he put before the House last week because it means for Quebec massive job losses and impacts the Quebec economy. He did nothing to explain to Quebecers what his motion would actually entail and the consequences of exactly what he put forward.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the motion voted on yesterday enjoys broad support in Quebec.

From 1980 to 1990, Canada fought against acid rain using a territorial approach, which enabled the country to surpass its international targets.

In the wake of yesterday's vote on the Kyoto protocol, what is preventing the government from taking the same approach? Can the government promise to give money to Quebec so that it can implement the Kyoto protocol in its own territory?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not about money. This is about the environment. We have seen the Liberal record of billions of dollars in wasted money and we are 35% above our Kyoto targets.

If the member actually cared about the environment and the future of Quebecers, he would be working with us for a sensible approach instead of putting forward a motion that means shutting down the Quebec economy and doing nothing for the environment.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a lot of Canadians and members in the House welcomed the idea of having an appointments commission that would take a look at the whole process of how appointments are made. What we did not realize was that the Prime Minister thought that there was only one man out of the 32 million Canadians who was qualified to take this position. What we did not realize was that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has the floor to put his question.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, in the face of this Canadians are rather shocked. Given that the House of Commons was not prepared to appoint the one man, someone who made quite a controversial speech to the Fraser Institute, the Prime Minister's favourite think tank, the question is, why would the Prime Minister decide to cancel a good idea just because his guy did not get the job?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Gwyn Morgan was voted the top CEO in the country. He brought forward with him a team of highly qualified executives, people from different partisan backgrounds, all of whom were willing to work to clean up the appointments process in this country for nothing, absolutely free to the taxpayers of Canada.

Mr. Morgan, instead of having an examination of his credentials, was treated to a buffoonish show of partisan behaviour at the committee. No quality person is going to go before that committee again for such an appointment and this Prime Minister is not going to ask anyone to do it.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to understand it now. Votes for the best CEO by whomever casts those votes is respected by the Prime Minister, but a vote in the House of Commons to respect international engagements on the environment is not respected by the Prime Minister. A vote in this place that would reject his personal choice for the appointments commission would not be respect by him.

This afternoon and this evening, when there is a vote in the House on the deployment of troops in Afghanistan, is he going to respect that vote or is he just going to say, "It's my way or the highway and just get used to it"?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am clear the vote has consequences. We are not proceeding with Mr. Morgan and his team on the public appointments commission.

In terms of Afghanistan, on Sunday the foreign affairs critic of the NDP said, "It's not a question of should we be in Afghanistan. Yes, we should; we need to be - we need to be in [for] the long haul...". And yet today members of the NDP say they will vote against it, so maybe I will just wait a few days and we will get a different position from the NDP.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL AID**

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is demanding that Parliament make an important decision on sending our troops into harms way for another two years without an opportunity to get briefings from foreign affairs, CIDA and defence, so we can make a decision based on the facts. This is utterly irresponsible. Aid is critically important for the success of the superb job our troops are doing in Afghanistan.

Will the Minister of International Cooperation tell the House how much money CIDA is going to invest in Kandahar over the next two years?

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the year 2006-07, the government has committed \$100 million to help the people of Afghanistan, and address the issues of development and poverty in that country. In the next two years, an additional \$100 million will be allocated.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the budget for Afghanistan. It is not the budget for Kandahar where the bulk of our troops are, where the bulk of our troops are paying the price, and where their lives are on the line. This issue is critically important to the success of our troops on the ground in Kandahar and the minister knows this.

Will the minister tell the House specifically, how much money will CIDA invest in Kandahar over the next two years with the extension of this proposed mission? Can she specifically tell us how much now?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that the Afghan people need help, in Kandahar and throughout the country. There are not two Afghanistans, there is but one.

\$100 million in aid will be given to the Afghan people every year until 2011.

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AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important that Canadians fully understand the nature of our mission in Afghanistan. The Conservatives are pressing us to take a position in this evening's vote, even though we have access to only part of the information on the extension of the mission. What is more, what we know comes to us not from the government, but from the media.

Can the Prime Minister assure Canadians that this House and the Standing Committee on National Defence will be regularly informed of the military and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear: our government is asking for an extension of the commitments of the former Liberal government for another two

years, and an extension of assistance for humanitarian development for another four years. One addition is being made to the military mission: Canada is requesting general command of the International Security Assistance Force, which requires the deployment of a high-ranking general and subordinates for one year, probably in February 2008. This is the only addition to our military mission.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this answer is totally unacceptable. It is time the government started answering the questions that we ask. The Prime Minister wants to commit our soldiers for two more years, until 2009, but he allows us only six hours of debate on the issue.

Why does the Prime Minister not understand that the lives of our brave Canadian soldiers deserve more thorough reflection than can be had in a six-hour debate?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if any member of the Liberal Party wishes to vote against an extension or the completion of their mission, that is deplorable. There is no excuse for it.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Standing Committee on National Defence passed a resolution which asks to study the various aspects of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, including the status of the troops and equipment and Canada's capacity to meet its other international obligations, so that the House can make an informed decision.

Why would the government not wait for the recommendations of the Standing Committee on National Defence before making a final decision on extending the Canadian mission in Afghanistan?

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as is its right, any committee of Parliament can decide to study anything it wants. We are having a vote tonight on Afghanistan, as agreed by all House leaders of all parties.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister once said: "The Liberal Party cannot ignore the democratic will of elected Members of Parliament whenever it fits their political agenda".

Are we to understand from the Prime Minister's attitude that, just four months after his election, he has already forgotten the noble commitments which supposedly set him apart from the Liberals?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat in French what I just said in English. Yesterday, the Bloc Québécois was in agreement with procedures for the debate and the vote. Today it has a different position.

Possibly if I wait a few days the Bloc Québécois will have again changed its position on Afghanistan.

*Oral Questions***FIREARMS REGISTRY**

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety just announced that he is changing the gun registry and that hunting rifles will no longer be included.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin has the floor.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, his counterpart in Quebec has asked that he reverse his decision and leave the registry in place.

Will the minister respond favourably to this request from the Government of Quebec?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my office and I were pleased to receive a call from the minister for the beautiful Province of Quebec.

I can tell him that we are going to consult the provinces. I can also assure the minister that we will continue to require safe storage of firearms, safety training, a police check and registration of handguns. I will be consulting with the minister.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is also announcing that the RCMP will be responsible for managing the registry from now on.

Does the government intend to propose to the Government of Quebec that the Sûreté du Québec take on this responsibility in Quebec, with an appropriate budget transfer, especially since the Sûreté du Québec believes in the need for the national firearms program and reports to a minister who also believes in the program?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what will happen. I will consult with the minister on this, because the Sûreté du Québec has ideas, of course, and I will consult its representatives. I am in favour—we are all in favour—of effective gun control.

* * *

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two major Canadian lumber industry groups have filed lawsuits against both the Government of Canada and the government of the United States. They state that the two governments are preventing Canadian private industry from finalizing the decision of the NAFTA panel that has found that Canadian softwood is not subsidized. That decision should be final and recognized. All duties which have been collected must be returned.

Why will the Prime Minister not stand up for Canadian companies and why did he give away what they had already won under NAFTA?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should be prepared to go to his community, where the softwood lumber industry has been on its back for the last five years, and say that he wants more years of litigation and that he wants to cast aside a negotiated settlement that will bring stability, job growth, investment and a

sense of a future for the softwood lumber industry across Canada and in northern Ontario.

• (1445)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, who does he think asked me to ask the question?

It is absolutely shameful that a Canadian company needs to sue its own government to protect our legal rights. The United States has not yet abandoned any of its litigation. Our industries are still paying \$40 million a month in duties. Many are totally tapped out of capital financing and on the brink of bankruptcy. It is another stab in the back.

The Speaker: I am afraid the hon. member's time has expired. The hon. the Minister of International Trade.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the lawyers were probably the ones who got him to ask the question.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have spent on legal fees in this action. This negotiated settlement was very much in the interests of the Ontario forest industry and the forest industry across the country.

We have not given up our legal rights. We have merely suspended the extraordinary challenge. It can be continued, if this negotiation is not completed.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a NAFTA panel was preparing to confirm that Canadian softwood lumber is not subsidized just before the government capitulated to the Americans. Now, our industry must sue its own government in order to ensure compliance with NAFTA.

Rather than making the Canadian industry the priority by giving it a legal footing within NAFTA, the Prime Minister and his Minister of International Trade approved everything and abandoned everything. Why?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said to the previous question, we have not given up our legal rights. We have negotiated a settlement. We have protected Canadian forest policy. We have, if anything, protected Canadian sovereignty.

We have an agreement from the United States not to launch further aggressive trade actions. Those hon. members, with their cheap partisan politics, are inviting us to go back into a trade war, to go back into litigation, to go back into uncertainty, to go back into unemployment and to go back to destroying the softwood lumber industry.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was established some time ago that the minister knows nothing about partisan politics.

Oral Questions

Despite veiled threats to the provinces and industry, Ontario softwood producers have been cut loose in their fight to see free trade respected. It seems that the government is more interested in playing the role of butler to the U.S. industry than protecting Canadian jobs and ensuring our industry can compete in the future.

Why did the government gut NAFTA and give \$500 million to American companies to continue to harass Canadian softwood producers?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I may not know much about partisan politics, but I think know a thing or two about softwood lumber.

The government is dead set on protecting and improving NAFTA, not on destroying it. We have not given up our legal position. We are building on NAFTA. We are re-energizing NAFTA. We are re-energizing the softwood lumber industry in our country.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we heard the Auditor General's condemnation of the Liberal waste and mismanagement in the long gun registry. The government is committed to addressing the issue of the registry. Today we delivered.

Could the Minister for Public Safety tell the House his plans for the long gun registry?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I thank my colleague, the member for Yorkton—Melville, for his diligence on this file for years, keeping it before the public and showing us the importance of it.

We want to do a number of things. We want to ensure that Canadians have effective gun control. That is why we are maintaining the handgun registry. That is why we are maintaining the list of prohibited and restricted weapons. That is why we still need to have a licence to acquire a firearm. That is why we are still requiring safety checks and that firearms be stored safely.

When it comes to the long gun registry, which has cost close to \$1 billion and has not been effective, we say it is time to put an end to that and get effective gun control for Canadians.

* * *

• (1450)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment has once again embarrassed Canada on the international stage. In Bonn I witnessed the minister stand up and tell the world that Canada was going to cut and run on its commitments to do something about climate change.

After 13 years of Liberal neglect, Canadians could be forgiven for thinking our reputation could not get any worse. Sadly, they were wrong. The International Climate Action Network has called on the minister to step up and recommit to Canada's targets or to step aside as chair of this UN convention.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only people who have anything to be embarrassed about on this are the Liberals. After 13 years of no action on the environment, we are now at 35% above our Kyoto targets. The international community is well aware of that.

What the member cannot handle is that I am actually telling the truth. When it comes to the Liberal record on the environment, the emperor has no clothes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is the minister is running away from Canada's commitments when it comes to climate change. Every other country went to Bonn with a plan and a commitment to meet their targets, except Canada. India and China showed up with plans that were better than ours.

The UN has offered its assistance for some counselling for the government, some help and assistance in finding out that it can actually meet its targets.

Will the government simply just state the obvious, take the help it needs and receive the counselling that it so desperately wants?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is too bad we used taxpayer dollars and hosted the member to come all the way to Bonn, and he comes back with this rhetoric. What happened in Bonn is that Norway—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of the Environment has the floor to answer a question that was asked of her and we have to be able to hear the answer.

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member did not use his time over there to be constructive. Instead, he meddled in things he should not have. If he actually got to the truth of what happened over there, he would know that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of the Environment has the floor to answer the question. We will have some order, please.

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member were truthful about what happened in Bonn, he would know that Japan, New Zealand, Norway and Canada have all taken the exact same position, and that is there needs to be an assessment of the Kyoto protocol over the next two years before any further commitments are made.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety should take into account that the majority of Canadians, and a good number of editorial boards, support the gun registry. For example, *La Presse* believes that the government would be making a terrible mistake by eliminating the registry. *Le Devoir* states that the shortcomings that remain to be fixed have nothing to do with the relevance of the registry, which has been confirmed by its users, the police.

Does the government intend to listen to the Canadian people?

[English]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, any poll that would be done of Canadians asking if they want effective gun control and if they are tired of money being wasted on gun control that does not work, I think they would agree with that.

Quoting editorialists is one thing. How about quoting some of the chiefs of police? The Calgary Police Association said today:

Wiping the slate clean and not making responsible gun owners into criminals is a good start.

The chief of police from Toronto said today:

—we know the gun problem in Toronto is overwhelmingly a problem of illegal handguns.

Gangsters who carry guns in the city of Toronto do not register those guns so any changes in the gun registry are not going to have a significant impact on our efforts to control the operation...

Let us quote the police officers who are doing the work.

● (1455)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quoting exactly what was said by the chair of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and other law enforcement authorities.

However, whatever the merits of the gun registry and the government's intention to kill it, the announcement of an amnesty and non-prosecution, while the existing law is still in place, is an abuse of Parliament and an abuse of due process.

If the government wants to kill the registry, why not come before Parliament and seek to change the law? Why does the government act by fiat rather than parliamentary vote? Why does it presuppose that Parliament will in fact repeal the law? Why is there this affront to Parliament to due process—

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, talking about coming before Parliament, the Auditor General has tabled her report and it was an incredible indictment of that former government hiding the results and hiding the money.

If he wants to quote people and police chiefs, let me quote the former police chief in Ottawa, who was also the former chairman of the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs. He said this about the Liberals:

I was assured by government — it's on budget. They were lying. It bothers me.

Those are the words of the former chief of police, not my words.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. minister was not suggesting that any member of this House was not telling the truth. He knows he cannot do indirectly what he cannot do directly, otherwise we would all have dozens of quotes that would be quite unparliamentary and that is not permitted.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

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ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently, ACOA advertised the position of vice-president for the province of P.E.I.

It has become common knowledge that a political operative and employee of the Conservative premier may be handed the \$135,000 job. In fact, it would appear the job description was tailored to ensure he gets it, including making the position only English essential, not bilingual, even though other positions reporting to the VP require bilingualism.

This is not supposed to be a political appointment. It is a public service position.

Will the Prime Minister ensure his part time ACOA minister will not interfere with the hiring process?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as for being a part time ACOA minister, it just proves once again that a Conservative can do in part time what it takes Liberals not even to be able to accomplish.

As far as patronage appointments, this minister and this government will not take lessons from a party of pork that took it to new levels every day when it was in government.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the party that pledged to keep politics out of ACOA and to do a value for money audit. One does not keep politics out of ACOA by throwing Conservatives into it, especially the friends of the minister and friends of the political premiers in Atlantic Canada.

The government says one thing and it does another.

Why would the Prime Minister allow the part time Minister of ACOA to interfere with the hiring process?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me answer my ineffective critic across the way. If the member is so concerned about the way this department is operating, I would like to know why he comes cap in hand begging for ACOA projects for his riding.

As for the appointment of an individual, who has served in the cabinet of Prince Edward Island, being somehow not effective or not up to the job of representing the people of Prince Edward Island, I think he should take it up with the citizens of that province.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on June 1, it will be exactly four years that 6,000 correctional officers have been working without a contract. However, this government promised in writing during the election to negotiate specific working conditions.

What is this government waiting for to keep the promises it made in writing in January and give the correctional officers a fair pension fund that takes into account the great risks and high level of stress related to their work?

• (1500)

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will say directly to my colleague from Quebec that this government is currently working very hard with these public servants. They worked for four years on getting a contract with the previous government. I have already met with their union representatives twice and spoke to them on the phone twice. My assistant deputy minister is working very hard with this group. I hope we will have a solution as soon as possible.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the correctional officers have been working without a contract for four years.

Does the President of the Treasury Board not think it is time for this government to show its good faith, not just talk on the telephone, and fulfill its commitments and sign an agreement with the correctional officers?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said that this problem with the previous government went on for four years. In my first 100 days in office, I have met with this union and spoken to its representatives four times in all. My assistant deputy minister is working with this group to get a real solution, a solution that the public servants can support and the government will support. As soon as possible, I will announce in this House the positive results achieved for the public servants and taxpayers alike.

* * *

[English]

PAY EQUITY

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, women who work full time in Canada earn only 71% of what men earn. The previous Liberal government committed to table new pay equity legislation by the end of 2006.

By contrast, in 1998 the current Prime Minister said that pay equity was “a rip-off” for taxpayers and that the federal government should “scrap its ridiculous pay equity law”. Is this still the view of the Prime Minister and, if not, will he table new pay equity legislation before the end of this year?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the equality of men and women is something that this government gives great importance to. The equality of public servants is something that is required for the good functioning of government and we strongly believe that we must treat every public servant fairly.

This was another example of where the previous government said, after 13 long years, that it was just about ready to get on with it. We do not need any lectures from the member opposite. The member opposite who sat in the government throughout all those years did absolutely nothing in this regard.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, at the agriculture committee, the CEO of the Farmer Rail Car Coalition said that if the government had given its fleet of hopper cars over to the FRCC it would have had to charge a lease fee to farmers. He then said that with the FRCC plan there “will be some increased cost to farmers”.

Could the transport minister tell the House if the government's decision to keep the hopper cars means any increased cost to farmers?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while farmers have had a hard time making ends meet over the last 13 years, this government respects farmers and is committed to taking action. This is why this government, in Bill C-11, is bringing in an amendment to lower the revenue cap. The amendment will pass on savings to the farmers of Canada, who, everybody knows, need it. They will be getting \$50 million.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said yesterday that no federal organization has taken responsibility for assessing the extent of the insidious mould problem on reserves and no one is developing a comprehensive strategy to address it. This is a serious health and safety issue for first nations.

Which of those ministers will take responsibility for this disaster and ensure the resources are available to deal with this problem?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has expressed a tale of mismanagement that has a direct impact on the health and safety of aboriginal Canadians. We do not have to make any excuses but we will be part of the solution rather than the members opposite who have been part of the problem for the last 13 years.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, without last year's NDP budget the Conservatives would have only committed \$450 million to aboriginal peoples over two years, not the \$1.15 billion that the minister is fond of bragging about.

Point of Order

The Auditor General's report shows that Conservative promises are not nearly enough to reduce the gaps in the standard of living for first nations, Inuit and Métis. Will the minister commit to implementing every single recommendation in the Auditor General's report for first nations programs immediately?

● (1505)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the House that we intend to fulfill our promises that were based on budget 2006, promises to aboriginal Canadians from coast to coast to coast, which the hon. member and her caucus voted against.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Joan Burke, Minister of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; and Dr. David Dolphin, winner of the 2005 Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for Science and Engineering.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, I believe the opposition House leader would now like to ask the Thursday question.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker, because of the unusual events of tomorrow, the Thursday question becomes the Wednesday question.

I wonder if the government House leader would indicate what his work program is through the rest of this week and the full week after the Victoria Day break?

I also wonder, while he is on his feet, if he could advise us if the Prime Minister will be tabling in the House the document, clearly a cabinet document, that he was reading from and quoting from directly at 2:38 p.m. this afternoon?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the House will consider a motion by the Prime Minister of Canada supporting the extension of Canada's contribution to international efforts at reducing poverty, enhancing human rights and gender equality for all Afghan men, women and children.

Tomorrow, but no later than Friday, we would like to conclude debate at second reading on Bill C-13, the budget implementation bill, in order to ensure, among other important objectives, that parents will receive their much anticipated and needed child care benefit cheques by July 1.

I would like to use this opportunity as well to remind members that tomorrow the House opens at 9 a.m., with statements by members at 11 a.m., followed by question period at 11:15 a.m. At noon, the House will adjourn in order to allow arrangements to be made for the Prime Minister of Australia to address both Houses of Parliament at 3 p.m.

After Bill C-13 is sent to committee, it is our intention to call two important justice bills: Bill C-9, the conditional sentencing bill; and Bill C-10, the mandatory minimum penalties bill.

We will continue to debate those bills. In addition, I would indicate, pending progress on Bill C-13, that Tuesday, May 30 and Thursday, June 1 would be allotted days.

I am sure that answers all the hon. member's questions.

* * *

[Translation]

POINT OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order regarding oral question period.

Allow me to quote from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by Marleau and Montpetit at page 372:

Any document quoted by a Minister in debate, or in response to a question, must be tabled.

The Prime Minister quoted a document in response to a question asked earlier. Does the Prime Minister intend to table this document?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take that under advisement and get back to the House.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader has indicated he will look into the matter.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: The Chair is entitled to hear argument from the hon. member on the point of order. There is a provision that documents quoted are to be tabled but there is also a provision that briefing notes prepared for ministers are not. We have to determine what it was.

The government House leader has undertaken to check this out and we will hear back from him. The Chair will then make a decision on whether the document has to be tabled or not. I think I have to hear both sides of the story before I make a decision.

● (1510)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, in making your determination, will you also review the video of question period because it was quite obvious that the Prime Minister was quoting a cabinet document and not a briefing for question period.

Point of Order

DECORUM

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to intervene with regard to the same point of order. I saw with my own eyes that it was a cabinet document. We insist it be tabled immediately. We have no need to wait for consultations. It was clear to the naked eye. I saw it myself.

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. Leader of the Government in the House is very grateful for the help of the hon. members for Outremont and Ottawa—Vanier on this point. It will help him considerably in his consultations and in preparing his response to the point of order raised.

[English]

We will deal with that one when we hear back from the government House leader, which we look forward to with great enthusiasm.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a very important point of order on what happened in the course of question period today. The Minister of the Environment made some suggestion that in my accompaniment of her, which, under the agreements within the parties allows the minister to travel abroad, that I took this agreement and accompanied the minister to Bonn, Germany. In that accompaniment, I am wondering, Mr. Speaker, if you might request that the minister withdraw the comment, and also as the Speaker, direct her to offer an apology, because in her statement she imbued all sorts of comments about my participation, not only on the environment file, which she may address to some of her colleagues who have sat with me on committee over the years, but also my participation in Bonn, Germany and the diligence with which I took up my directives.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I was referring to was a number of comments that the critic from the NDP made in a presser yesterday. In particular, he referred to how he spent most of his time in Bonn arguing with Environment Canada employees. I took offence to that, because Environment Canada employees and our department, I would say, are the people who care most about the department in this country. I did not appreciate him coming to Bonn to argue with the Canadian delegation, who went out of their way to make him feel comfortable, to take him to all of the meetings—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. It seems to me that this is not a point of order at all.

An hon. member: It is a question of privilege.

The Speaker: It may be a question of privilege. There are various solutions open to the members, but it sounds to me like a debate as to what happened in Bonn, which is not the subject of a question of privilege in this House. There are opportunities for late shows and there are opportunities for opposition day motions on subjects like this, but when questions are asked it is not for the Speaker to control the answers.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 16(2) states:

When a Member is speaking, no Member shall pass between that Member and the Chair, nor interrupt him or her, except to raise a point of order.

Respectfully, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment, while the member for the NDP was addressing the Chair, moved from this seat and walked directly across the chamber without respecting the standing order.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I think it is time we moved on with routine proceedings. I appreciate the fact that the House seems in a mood for technicalities today, but I am afraid that members pass between the person who has the floor and the Speaker with monotonous regularity in the House. I regret that the standing order is breached in this way and I am glad that the hon. member for Mississauga South has pointed this out for all hon. members.

I am sure they will remember that when they turn to go to their seats they must go around the back way, or that way, if they are going to avoid breaking the rule which prevents passage between the person who has the floor and the Speaker. I thank the hon. member for pointing that out. I am sure the Minister of the Environment and all hon. members will follow this rule very carefully in the future.

Is this another point of order from the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay?

• (1515)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): I believe it is a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of the Environment stands up in the House and accuses a member who is doing his job on behalf of Canadians and constituents of going on the taxpayers' dollar. That is what she said: to use the taxpayers' money. It is not his job to carry her ideological luggage when she goes to Europe. I—

The Speaker: Order, please. Arguments about what members do when they are not in the House may be a subject of debate, but in the Chair's view they are not a question of privilege, because a member's privileges have not been infringed by the events that I have heard described so far.

I do not think it is necessary to keep going into it. I have suggested various remedies.

If the hon. member thinks he has a question of privilege, he can send a written notice to the Chair, as the rules require, and then present an argument on a question of privilege. He rose on a point of order and was recognized on a point of order. I do not think there was a point of order and I do not think the minister's response indicated there was a point of order. It indicated a debate, so we will move on.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have some news that I am sure will be of interest to the House with respect to a previous point of order. I heard the comments from the former minister of transport, who believed that the Prime Minister was reading from a document.

I have had the opportunity to consult with the present Minister of Transport and he indicates to me that this was not the case. I am going to go with the advice of the present Minister of Transport. I hope this satisfies the House on that point of order.

The Speaker: That sounds like a transport of delight.

The hon. member for Outremont is rising. I trust we are not getting into a debate. I hope it is a new point of order.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I might suggest to the new Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities that he consider wearing glasses.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34, I have the honour to present to the House reports from the Canada-United Kingdom Interparliamentary Association concerning its trip to Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom with respect to the Good Friday peace process last year.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. The committee has studied the certificate of nomination of Mr. Gwyn Morgan to the position of chairperson of the public appointments commission and has agreed to report it.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, three reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: the first report, "Public Accounts of Canada 2005"; the second report, "Passport Office—Passport Services"; and the third report on the main estimates, vote 20, under finance.

The first and second reports are being re-tabled from the previous government and the committee is requesting a government response within the allotted time.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

The committee has adopted a report on the review of the mandate of CBC-SRC and has agreed to report it to the House.

● (1520)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. The committee has adopted as a report in this session the fourth report of the first session of the 38th Parliament, entitled "Northern Cod: A Failure of Canadian Fisheries Management", which is appended.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

[Translation]

KYOTO PROTOCOL IMPLEMENTATION ACT

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-288, An Act to ensure Canada meets its global climate change obligations under the Kyoto Protocol.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as you said, the purpose of this bill is to ensure that Canada meets its climate change obligations under the Kyoto protocol.

This bill creates an obligation on the minister to establish annually a climate change plan and make regulations. It also creates an obligation on the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to review the plan and the proposed regulations and submit a report to Parliament.

I hope that my colleagues from all parties will support this bill, which is vital to our future and to that of our children.

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

* * *

[English]

INDIAN ACT

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-289, An Act to amend the Indian Act (matrimonial real property and immovables).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill proposes to establish a matrimonial real property regime on those Indian reserves across Canada where such rules do not currently apply. This proposal states that on reserve residents would be protected by the matrimonial property rules of the province in which the majority of reserve lands are located.

I would emphasize that this bill is interim legislation only and would only apply until first nations assert their own law-making authority. Both the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development have called for immediate action on this issue.

Routine Proceedings

When the matrimonial property rights of aboriginal Canadians, most frequently women and children, are denied, their fundamental human rights are also denied. This bill would end that injustice. I ask for members' support.

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

* * *

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-290, An Act to amend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act (Northern Ontario).

She said: Mr. Speaker, between the years of 1997 and 2003, northern Ontario lost two ridings. This bill would enact an amendment to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act to ensure that northern Ontario maintains a minimum of 10 ridings.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (injuring or causing the death of a child before or during its birth while committing an offence).

He said: Mr. Speaker, current laws protect women who are victims of violence, or at least they are meant to do that. However, if a woman makes a choice to keep her child, there is no protection under current law for that unborn child.

Olivia Talbot, a young woman from Edmonton with her whole life ahead of her, had chosen to keep her child and raise a family. An ex-boyfriend brutally shot and killed her and then shot and killed her unborn child.

This bill would make it a separate offence to kill or injure an unborn child while committing a violent crime against its mother. I look forward to support from all parties for this bill.

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

* * *

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

KELOWNA ACCORD IMPLEMENTATION ACT

Right Hon. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-292, An Act to implement the Kelowna Accord.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has signed a historic agreement with the provinces, territories and leaders of the aboriginal peoples of Canada to close the gap between the quality of life of aboriginals and that of non-aboriginals.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada entered into a historic agreement with the provinces, the territories and the leadership of Canada's aboriginal people to close and ultimately eliminate the gaps between our aboriginal Canadians and non-aboriginal Canadians in the areas

of health care, education, housing, access to clean water and economic opportunity.

I believe and we believe it is vital that the Government of Canada honour its commitment. That is the purpose of this bill.

[*Translation*]

The government must keep its promises. That is the purpose of this initiative.

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

* * *

[*English*]

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to ensure that Canadian development assistance abroad is provided with a central focus on poverty reduction in a manner consistent with Canadian values, Canadian foreign policy and international human rights standards.

The minister will be obliged to advise the House as to whether this contributes to poverty reduction, takes into account perspectives of the poor, and is consistent with Canada's international human rights obligation. This bill flows directly from the report of the foreign affairs committee in the last Parliament.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-294, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (sports and recreation programs).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the constituents of Prince Albert to introduce this bill entitled "An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (sports and recreation programs)".

With this legislation an allowance given to young amateur athletes of up to \$350 per month by non-profit sports organizations for board and lodging will be exempt from taxation. The bill would allow non-profit amateur junior teams to once again operate without the fear of being taxed out of business. The bill would also protect the amateur status of athletes wishing to pursue athletic scholarships elsewhere.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-295, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to introduce this bill that will make amendments to the Canada Labour Code. The bill will strengthen and protect workers' rights by prohibiting replacement workers from doing their jobs. Banning replacement workers, scabs, decreases the length of labour disputes and that is good for workers, business and the economy. These proposed changes are just one more example of how we are standing up for working families.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-296, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (arrest without warrant).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reintroduce this bill which was introduced in the last Parliament and which had broad support. It would provide peace officers and police the power to arrest without warrant a person who is in breach of a probation order or binding a person who has breached their condition of parole.

Many times the police notice people who are breaking the law, their probation and parole, but are unable to make an arrest. This would enable them to do so to better protect the public. The police have requested this for a long time and I am happy to table the bill.

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

* * *

● (1530)

NATIONAL COLORECTAL CANCER MONTH ACT

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-297, An Act to designate the month of March as National Colorectal Cancer Month.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a private member's bill that calls on the government to recognize the month of March as National Colorectal Cancer Month. This year alone roughly 20,000 Canadians will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer. An estimated 8,500 will die from this terrible disease. Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer and the third most common form of cancer among men and women.

I had the opportunity to attend a breakfast lecture hosted by the Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada. I would like to commend the organization for its hard work in promoting the cause and I would like to extend special congratulations to Alain Gourd, Barry Stein and Garry Sears for their timeless efforts. On their behalf and on behalf of thousands of Canadians, I would like to introduce this bill, an act to designate the month of March as National Colorectal Cancer Month.

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

PERFLUOROCTANE SULFONATE VIRTUAL ELIMINATION ACT

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-298, An Act to add perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) to the Virtual Elimination List under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

She said: Mr. Speaker, the bill would require the Minister of the Environment to add perfluorooctane sulfonate to the virtual elimination list compiled under subsection 65(2) of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act within nine months of the bill becoming law.

The bill would also require the minister to make regulations prescribing the quantity or concentration of the substance that may be released into the environment, either alone or in combination with any other substance in order to achieve the virtual elimination of the substance.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-299, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Competition Act (personal information obtained by fraud).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill is intended to address some of the serious challenges related to the theft of personal information. The bill would amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Competition Act in order to protect individuals against the acquisition of their own personal information through fraud and impersonation. I encourage all members to examine and support the bill.

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

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD ACT

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-300, An Act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act (direct sale of grain).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to rise on behalf of all the farmers of western Canada under the Canadian Wheat Board block to present a private member's bill to do away with that arcane and punitive buyback provision in the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

That buyback would not proceed on processed grain produced by the producer, directly taken to an association or a firm engaged in processing as long as that firm was majority held by producers themselves.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-301, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (blood alcohol).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a private member's bill that is long overdue in Canada.

MADD Canada estimates that just under four Canadians are killed each day and just under 190 Canadians are injured each day due to crashes involving alcohol or drugs. Approximately 75,000 Canadians are impacted by impaired drivers annually, and there are an estimated 12.5 million trips of impaired driving each year in Canada.

As such, this private member's bill calls on the government to amend the Criminal Code to reduce the legal limit of alcohol permitted in the blood while operating a motor vehicle from 80 milligrams or 0.08% to 50 milligrams, or 0.05%.

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

* * *

●(1535)

PEST CONTROL PRODUCTS ACT

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-302, An Act to amend the Pest Control Products Act (prohibition of use of chemical pesticides for non-essential purposes).

She said: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the House debated a motion to place a moratorium on the non-essential, cosmetic use of pesticides until the safety of those chemicals is proven by scientific and medical experts. Members of the House cynically rejected the motion, refusing to protect the health of Canadians against the risks posed by entirely unnecessary chemical exposure and refusing to protect the environment.

I, and my NDP colleagues, believe that Canadians want pesticides to be proven safe before they are sprayed on their lawns and playgrounds. Today I am pleased to introduce an act to amend the Pest Control Products Act that would prohibit the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes until their safety is scientifically proven. I encourage all Canadians to remind their MPs and insist on greater medical precautions when it comes to the health of our children.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE ACT

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-303, An Act to establish criteria and conditions in respect of funding for early learning and child care programs in order to ensure the quality, accessibility, universality and accountability of those programs, and to appoint a council to advise the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development on matters relating to early learning and child care.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I am proud to present to Parliament, on behalf of the NDP, our bill on early learning and child care.

[*English*]

We in the NDP believe this may be the most important piece of new legislation, not just in this Parliament but in every Parliament since the Canada Health Act was established. The legislation we are introducing today is based on the principles of quality, universality, accessibility, accountability and educational development.

With the challenges currently facing our society, child care should not be an afterthought or luxury. With this act we aim to enshrine national child care into legislation to protect and build child care for future generations.

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

* * *

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE TREATMENT OF AUTISM ACT

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-304, An Act to provide for the development of a national strategy for the treatment of autism and to amend the Canada Health Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that would provide much needed support for many Canadians and their families who are affected by autism spectrum disorder. This bill would see that two forms of very effective treatments, applied behavioural analysis and intensive behavioural intervention, be covered under the Canada Health Act.

It would also compel the federal Minister of Health to work with his provincial counterparts in developing a national strategy for the treatment of autism. The bill would require that a first ministers conference would be held this year before December 31, 2006, and that a national strategic plan be developed and tabled in the House before December 31, 2007.

I hope my colleagues in the House will join me in supporting this very important issue.

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

* * *

●(1540)

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-305, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (exemption from taxation of 50% of United States social security payments to Canadian residents).

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill is designed to restore tax fairness to Canadians, especially Canadian seniors who worked in the U.S. but lived and invested in our communities across Canada. Ten years ago they received a 70% tax hike. This bill seeks to reverse that. This bill received broad support from members in the last Parliament and was sent to committee. I look forward to their support again to ensure our seniors receive their deserved tax fairness.

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

* * *

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-306, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan (early pension entitlement for police officers and firefighters).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this bill on behalf of our hard-working police and firefighters. Firefighting and policing are physically and emotionally demanding and, as we learned with the recent death of Senior Constable John Atkinson of the Windsor Police Service, it is very dangerous as well.

Early retirement has long been accepted as being in the best interests of officers, their families and the public they serve. Our Income Tax Act permits police and firefighters to retire early at age 55. The officers and firefighters who retire early do not currently have the ability to make CPP contributions from 55 to 60 years of age. This bill is intended to address that concern.

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

* * *

PHTHALATE CONTROL ACT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-307, An Act to prohibit the use of benzyl butyl phthalate (BBP), dibutyl phthalate (DBP) and di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP) in certain products and to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill seeks to ban a collection of chemicals known as phthalates that end up in products, particularly products used by young children. This would be one of the first times in Canadian law that the onus of responsibility would be shifted on to the manufacturer to prove that a product was safe prior to its arrival in the marketplace. This is a bill that addresses the most vulnerable populations in our society, particularly children and pregnant women. There are similar bans in Europe and many of the United States.

Support from the environment groups and health groups across the country has been strong. I look forward to support from members across the aisle and around this House.

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

* * *

PETITIONS**SUDAN**

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by many that calls on Parliament to take immediate action, with the help of Canada's allies, using all means

necessary to increase intervention efforts regarding the genocide in Darfur, Sudan, so as to actively prevent the ongoing crisis there.

Today we learned that the Security Council voted unanimously yesterday to begin the process of establishing a UN chapter 7 peacekeeping force to end the slaughter of civilians in the Darfur region of Sudan. We, as parliamentarians and of course as government, have to act on this very immediate crisis that is taking place. Also we should send peacekeeping forces and in fact work with the International Criminal Court to arrest the 51 Sudanese individuals so far identified as being responsible for crimes against humanity and other gross human rights abuses.

[Translation]

OLDER WORKERS

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of tabling in this House a petition signed by over 600 citizens from Drummond riding, informing the House: that the textile industry has been in decline in Quebec for a few years;

that several massive lay-offs have taken place during this time;

that the majority of individuals who have lost their jobs are over the age of 55.

Consequently, they ask Parliament:

to intervene so that the government reactivates the POWA program or any other equivalent program in order for these workers to continue to receive a decent income.

• (1545)

[English]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have in front of me hundreds of signatures of citizens from Windsor, LaSalle, Tecumseh, London, Duncan, Wallaceburg, Kingsville and Leamington pleading with the House of Commons to have a high quality and accessible universal child care program. They urge the House to enshrine the child care act in legislation and that it be a cornerstone of Canada, as is the Canada Health Act.

* * *

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.

*Government Orders***MOTIONS FOR PAPERS**

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 notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA'S COMMITMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC) moved:

That,

(1) whereas the House on April 10, 2006 debated a motion in support of Canada's significant commitment in Afghanistan;

(2) whereas Canada's commitment in Afghanistan is an important contribution, with that of more than 30 other countries, to international efforts under the auspices of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO);

(3) whereas these international efforts are reducing poverty, enhancing human rights and gender equality, strengthening civil society and helping to build a free, secure and self-sustaining democratic state for all Afghan men, women and children; and

(4) whereas Canada's commitment in Afghanistan is consistent with Canada's support of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world;

the House support the government's two year extension of Canada's deployment of diplomatic, development, civilian police and military personnel in Afghanistan and the provision of funding and equipment for this extension.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as members of the House know, we made a pledge during the last election campaign to put international treaties and military engagements to a vote in this chamber.

[*Translation*]

If we made this promise, it was because before we send diplomats, relief workers and soldiers on dangerous missions abroad, it is important to be able to tell them that Canada's parliamentarians believe in their objectives and support what they are doing.

[*English*]

This is an opportune time for such a debate and such a vote. Last week the Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Afghanistan. During his visit to Afghanistan, President Karzai requested that Canada extend its peace and security operation in his country beyond our existing commitment which expires in February 2007. This operation of our national defence personnel is fundamentally linked with our other diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. President Karzai and the Afghan people are waiting for our response.

[*Translation*]

This evening we will vote for a renewed commitment.

[*English*]

It is a vote that is long overdue. It is a vote that all parties in the House have asked for and have agreed to. As members know, our diplomats, aid workers and soldiers have been deployed in Afghanistan for almost five years.

Despite the fact that members of three of four parties in the House have consistently voiced support for a mission in Afghanistan, Canadians on the ground in Kabul, Kandahar and in the PRT have never received a clear mandate from this Parliament. That is not fair to the brave men and women who wear the maple leaf. They need to know that their Parliament is behind them.

President Karzai's request provides us with an opportune time to explain our next moves forward and to renew our commitment. Today we will debate and tonight we will vote.

President Karzai is not the only person waiting for Canada to decide. Our international and NATO allies will also be watching. They, too, want a renewed commitment. As members know, both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, our two primary partners in southern Afghanistan, have recently renewed their commitments, two year and three year commitments respectively. The Dutch and the British have made their commitments.

Our rationale for being in Afghanistan is clear. It is in the interests of this country.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

We are there as well at the invitation of the Afghan government. We are taking part in a multinational operation sanctioned by the United Nations.

[*English*]

Our mission there is not some sort of throwaway option among competing alternatives. It is not a manufactured make-work project to keep soldiers and diplomats busy. It certainly is not a unilateral effort on Canada's part.

The events of September 11, 2001 were a wake-up call not just to Americans but to people in all free and democratic nations. Two dozen Canadians were killed as a result of the attacks on the twin towers. They were our ordinary fellow citizens, people with stories, families and dreams. The attacks in New York and Washington have been followed by others in Madrid, Bali, London, Turkey, Egypt and elsewhere.

[*Translation*]

We should be clear. Canada is not safe from such attacks. We will never be safe so long as we are a society that defends freedom, democracy and human rights.

[*English*]

We have known as a nation since the beginning that as long as we defend the values of freedom, democracy and human rights, we will not be safe from attack from those who oppose them. Not surprisingly, al-Qaeda has singled out Canada along with a number of other nations for attack. It is the same al-Qaeda that together with the Taliban took an undemocratic, failed Afghanistan and made it a safe haven from which to plan terrorist attacks worldwide.

Government Orders

We just cannot sit back and let the Taliban backed by al-Qaeda or similar extremist elements return to power in Afghanistan. It cannot be allowed to happen. The continued existence of Taliban pockets following defeat of the regime means our efforts in Afghanistan have never been peacekeeping in the traditional sense.

Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are not interested in peace. They target civilians. They target women and children in a quest to impose once again their will and their dark and backward vision of life on the Afghan people. They promise their followers heaven in the afterlife. What they deliver is hell on earth.

[Translation]

The previous government recognized this.

[English]

In fact, the leader of the official opposition never shied away from voicing his support for fellow Canadians in Afghanistan. In the debate just last month on our mission to Afghanistan, he stated, “I want to start by echoing the minister’s words... We are very proud of them”. On numerous times he corrected misinformation about our role in Afghanistan. I quote:

We are in Afghanistan because the Afghans want us in Afghanistan. This is not an invasion or occupation. This is going to help people.

Support for the mission was echoed last month in the House by the member for Vancouver South, who stated:

Our government agreed to this deployment. We believed then and we believe now that destroying root and branch the agents and infrastructure of supply and training that made Afghanistan into a safe haven for international terrorism is in Canada’s vital national interest.

Support for our troops has also been expressed consistently by the Bloc Québécois and even some members of the New Democratic Party. I could quote the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore on this.

[Translation]

It is an opinion shared by the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l’Île, who stated: “Why should we be in Afghanistan? Because it is a question of international solidarity that can make Quebecers feel obliged to be there”.

I can tell you from direct experience that our men and women in Afghanistan are grateful to the many members from such diverse parties who supported what they are doing.

• (1555)

[English]

Together, diplomats, workers and soldiers from 35 countries are working with the government of Afghanistan to rebuild that country. We are providing knowledge, financial assistance, security; security that allows the Afghan people to build a justice system, develop and grow their economy, construct schools, hospitals and irrigation systems, and yes, ensure that the rights of the Afghan people are protected.

[Translation]

I am thinking of the right of women to be treated like human beings, of the right to see, read and say whatever one wants, of the right to choose one’s leaders through the electoral process.

[English]

There are real risks involved in helping the Afghan people achieve these gains. There are risks for Afghans, risks for our allies, and as we all know, risks for Canadians. We know this because we had again today a combat fatality. These risks, as tragic as they are, and these losses, as tragic as they are, are not unique to this time and this place. There were risks when Canada went to the Balkans, to Cyprus, or during the Suez crisis, and of course, in Korea and in two world wars.

Canadians accept risks when those risks are in the service of a greater good. We honour those who take risks and make the ultimate sacrifice by staying the course and supporting their mission.

[Translation]

In the government’s view, the emergence of a stable, safe, self-sufficient, democratic Afghanistan that will never again be a haven for terrorists or traffickers is well worth the effort.

[English]

Canadians, particularly young Canadians, often ask me what I saw in Afghanistan. They want to know what work we are doing there. I tell them the work is both serious and complex.

[Translation]

We are working together with our partners from Afghanistan, the UN, NATO and NGOs in an integrated international effort to support the recovery of this country.

[English]

Key to this are the 27,000 troops from dozens of countries, including Canadian Forces personnel, who are helping to stabilize Afghanistan so that vital humanitarian and development work can be undertaken.

The challenges are enormous. There are no quick fixes and success cannot be assured by military means alone.

In fact, Canada and her allies all agree that we need to promote simultaneous support for Afghan governance and economic development to bring about a lasting recovery. This is why we opened a mission in Kabul, in great danger in 2003, and recently doubled our presence there.

[Translation]

Canadians from our embassy are working directly every day with Afghans, the UN, the World Bank, NATO and our other partners to ensure that the reconstruction of this country is a success. This presupposes that the resources intended for development are there and distributed equitably among the Afghan people.

[English]

Our work is paying off. In little more than three short years, 12 million Afghans, both men and women, have registered to vote in two historic elections. Close to five million children have been enrolled in school, one-third of them young girls. Almost four million refugees have returned and more than half of all Afghan villages have received grants to allow them to begin to rebuild.

Government Orders

[Translation]

All that has happened in a country where, just a few years ago, there were no elections, there was virtually no public education, women had no rights, and the future looked very bleak.

[English]

I saw this progress first-hand, and it made me proud to know that Canada was there making it happen.

Working with our allies and the Afghan people, Canada has achieved great things, but there is much more to do.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Afghanistan is still the fifth poorest country in the world. The Taliban are trying to return to power and too many people have to fall back on drug trafficking to meet the needs of their families.

[English]

We need to extend our mission so we can work to finish the job the previous government started. We need to improve the security situation in southern Afghanistan to bring it in line with the north and the west of the country. We need to ensure that children in southern Afghanistan will be able to go to school without fear of attack. We need to ensure that the people there can get the things we take for granted, things like clean water, roads without mines and reliable sources of energy.

Stability in southern Afghanistan will also help the Afghan national government focus on improving the country's emerging democratic infrastructure.

[Translation]

That is to say, an independent human rights commission, a new central bank, and a professional police force.

[English]

Our mission in Afghanistan is one more example of the Canadian leadership tradition in world affairs, a tradition that crosses party lines, a tradition of which we are all proud, a tradition that favours actions over words, results over process, principle over politics.

The allied governments that have sent missions to Afghanistan are a diverse lot: conservative, liberal, social democrats; people in parties who would normally and naturally disagree on so many other day to day political issues, as we do in this chamber, but who share a common resolve to strengthen democracy, ensure equality rights for women, reduce poverty and make the free world safe from the threat of terrorism.

To achieve these objectives, our allies agree that we must eliminate the threat posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and train Afghan security forces so they are capable of sustaining security in their own country.

Therefore, this government is seeking Parliament's clear support to renew Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Our men and women need to know that we share their goals and support their efforts and are willing, regardless of polls that sometimes go up or down, to

back them for the next few years so they can finish the work they were sent there to do.

[Translation]

We are asking Parliament to make a commitment in three areas: diplomacy, development and defence.

[English]

All three are inextricably linked. In a moment I want to go through what we are asking Parliament specifically to support over the next couple of years.

I think I also need to be clear, given the events over the last 24 hours or so, of what the consequences would be if there were a No vote. Let me be clear on this. This would be a surprise to this government. In debates in this chamber up until last month and in private meetings until very recently, we had every reason to believe that three of four parties, which have consistently supported this action, would continue to do so.

Should that turn out not to be the case, this government is not in a position to simply walk away or to run away. What the government will do, if we do not get a clear mandate, the clear will of Parliament to extend for two years and beyond, is proceed cautiously with a one year extension. We cannot walk away quickly. We will proceed with another year and if we need further efforts or a further mandate to go ahead into the future, we will go so alone and we will go to the Canadian people to get that mandate.

We are asking for a two year mandate that extends the elements of the current deployment.

[Translation]

The first part of our commitment entails the construction of a permanent, secure Canadian embassy in Kabul, which will serve Canada's interests and meet Afghanistan's needs for at least 15 years.

The second is the approval of an additional \$310 million expenditure for development assistance from next year until 2010-11, which will raise Canada's total contribution to nearly \$1 billion over 10 years.

• (1605)

[English]

Third and finally, we are seeking to extend the mission of both the Canadian Forces in Kandahar as well as the efforts of Canadian military diplomats, development workers and police in the PRT, the provincial reconstruction team, for 24 more months. This mission extension, if the motion is passed, will cover the period from February 2007 to 2009 when we expect a transition of power in Afghanistan itself.

Extending the mission of the Canadian Forces has operational consequences. We will take on once again a second leadership rotation from November 2007 to May 2008, and this is new. As I said earlier today, we will be prepared to assume overall leadership of the ISAF for one year starting in February 2008.

Government Orders

Near the end of each calendar year, 2006, 2007, 2008, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and National Defence will evaluate the results of our involvement, in concert with our allies, according to the criteria set out at the London conference, and we will share this evaluation with parliamentarians of all parties.

There we have it, the reaffirmation of Canada's intent expressed through a clear and renewed commitment, a commitment that builds on past achievements, a commitment in line with Canadian values, a commitment that allows us to finish the job.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the right hon. Prime Minister for elaborating on further details, which probably should be included in the motion to be voted on tonight. Maybe he would agree to an amendment.

My question has to do with process. The Prime Minister will be aware that members are concerned about the swiftness of the requirement for this debate and vote. He indicated in his speech that both the Dutch and the British had already made their commitment to extend their missions for a further two years, but we only found out about this on Monday.

Could the Prime Minister advise the House when he found out about the extension request of two years from either NATO or Mr. Karzai? When was the first time he advised Parliament?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, first, I will say a couple of things to that.

In the first place, all the engagements that we are asking Parliament to back, with the one exception of command of ISAF as I mentioned, are all engagements as undertaken at the present time. These are extensions to Canada's current involvement, not changes.

He knows the government, of which he was previously a member, made these commitments. I would assume, as a member of the previous government, he is well aware of the time lines that are involved in terms of expectations of new engagements. We are coming up on an international conference. The fact that our NATO allies have extended their commitments is not a secret fact. This is a publicly known fact.

All I can say in terms of the process is the House was consulted in a take note debate in April. The view of his party at that time was clear, as it had been for the previous few years. His leader was consulted in the lead-up to this, and his party agreed to the process we proposed, which made this debate possible today.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the Prime Minister.

First, is he suggesting that if the House were to oppose the motion before us, that his government would proceed in any event with a further deployment on a mission in Afghanistan after 2007, despite the vote in the House?

Second, is he suggesting that the commitment would terminate ultimately in February 2009 because of a change of administration of some sort in Afghanistan. In his view, if the change, to which he has referred and which is rather vague, does not happen, what would Canada's plan be for the longer term?

• (1610)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things that I want to respond to in the questions.

First, as I said earlier, the government would quite frankly be surprised if we did not have the support of the same three or four parties that supported this mission from the outset and up to at least last weekend. If it were the case that we were surprised by the result of tonight's vote, I do not think it is feasible for Canada to simply walk away in the next few months. The government has to take its responsibilities and the safety of its soldiers and its diplomats seriously.

What we would do is proceed cautiously for a year, as I said. If we believe we need to go further beyond that, we will seek a mandate from the Canadian people.

What we are asking for here is to extend the mandate in this motion for a clear two years. That would bring us to the end of President Karzai's term, and that is where the allies, which have been with us from the beginning, are by and large at today.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former defence minister who has visited Afghanistan three times, I have nothing but huge admiration and support for our brave men and women of the Canadian Forces, and I have nothing but total support for the mission.

However, so suddenly has this debate been brought on, so little information has been provided in advance on such an important issue and so much time is remaining until decisions really have to be made, I find this whole process insulting, not only to members of Parliament but to members of the Canadian military.

Why does the Prime Minister so taint the process that people like myself, such natural supporters of the military, are required in our own minds to vote against the motion tonight?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, members across various parties in the House have requested a vote. Members of all parties, in particular the hon. member and his party, are more than aware of the details of our engagement in Afghanistan, which we are seeking to extend.

Let us be serious. The government believes there should be a vote. The government offered a vote and that vote was accepted. The process was accepted unanimously by the House, including by his party. If he does not like that, he should take that up with the leadership of his party.

However, we have men and women over there who are doing great work, who are prepared to take bullets for our country. If the hon. member and his party are not prepared to stand up and simply endorse the mission, then they are, frankly, not supporting the people on the ground they claim to support, and that is what they should do.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, will the Prime Minister acknowledge that he is not entitled to twist the meaning of his own motion?

It is not a motion to discover whether the House supports the mission. That is not the question.

Government Orders

The question asked is whether the House supports extending the mission by two years, without the House having any access to the information it needs?

Is the Prime Minister aware that the debate in the Netherlands took months and that the date of the vote was known well in advance.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that, if his repugnant motion is rejected by this House, we will have all the time needed to debate the matter and have the support of the House to extend the mission, once it has the information it needs?

• (1615)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, the House, especially the party opposite understands the mission in Afghanistan. I hope that, before sending our troops, our young men and women, into a military campaign, it understood the mission in Afghanistan.

This government wants strong support for our troops in Afghanistan. This is why we responded to calls from the parties to have a vote.

We know the NDP may vote against the motion. However, indications are that the other parties support the motion. It will be a good message for our troops.

I would just add that, in my own opinion, the comments by the parties have been clear up to this week. Our troops and the public have a hard time understanding why the parties suddenly change their mind when there is a vote.

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has asserted that the Dutch and the British have made their commitment, the implication being: What is wrong with Canada that it is not prepared to enter a new mission at this point beyond February 2007 when it ends? I do not think the Prime Minister intends to deceive this Parliament or the Canadian people.

Therefore, I wonder if he could please confirm his understanding that in fact the Dutch, who were to have been fully deployed long before now, have not yet done so, it has been delayed further until September and that may or may not happen. Second, the British deployment has been delayed as well, in both instances because they had serious concerns about whether operating under Operation Enduring Freedom was the way to go with an aggressive combat, search and kill mission, and they were concerned about the continuing uprising of the insurgency instead of the opposite.

Could he please confirm his understanding on those points?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I was in Afghanistan. I know the Minister of Foreign Affairs and others are in contact with our allies. The Dutch and the British are proceeding. I can tell the House that the Dutch, in large measure, are proceeding because they know Canada is behind this mission and they have never forgotten the Canadian role in the liberation of the Netherlands during World War II.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think I can speak for all members of the House in saying that this is certainly one of the most important and profound debates that we have had in this chamber. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that it is being held in conditions that have made it so difficult to get to the

results I believe we all want, which is the good of our country, the good of our troops and, ultimately, the good of the world.

As the Prime Minister said, in recent debates in the House I and other members of the Liberal caucus strongly supported our mission in Afghanistan. We were at the origins of it. We were proud of our decision and we still are. This mission is consistent with our foreign policy review and our defence review which foresaw difficult missions in failing states such as Afghanistan where the military is not there exclusively on military missions. In fact, we foresaw in our foreign policy review precisely the nature that this mission would need to take to be successful. It needed to have what we called a 3D approach: diplomacy, defence and development. We needed the military there to set conditions for success.

While we have this debate tonight let no one misinterpret what we are doing in all parts of the House when we do our parliamentary duty to understand the nature of the mission and the chances for success. I have been in Afghanistan, as have members of our caucus.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

I have seen the extraordinary feats our soldiers perform daily in difficult situations, in an inhospitable setting and in the face of serious danger.

[*English*]

I believe our soldiers know they are there to set conditions for success and to support our PRT, our provincial reconstruction team. We also have an aid component. One of our diplomats, the brave Glyn Berry, gave his life for his country, not as a military person but as a diplomat participating in an overall mission that was designed, not only with a military focus, but with a view to reconstructing Afghanistan so it may become a peaceful member of the family of nations once again.

I have heard from Afghans. I have heard from women and children. I, too, like the Prime Minister and others, have heard from President Karzai. We know why they support our mission and our troops. They want success across the board in building their country.

That of course was the question that we had in the last debate in this House. The question we have today is: Why we are prolonging this mission for two additional years at this time given the amount of information available to members of the House and given the present situation?

What we are looking for from the Prime Minister is not a description of the mission as one that is dealing with the insurgency or the threat to Canada. We have debated that. All members of this House participated in that debate and agreed that was the nature of the mission and the reason we went there in the first place.

I will repeat the words of the member from Markham. What I need and what those of us who have been so supportive of these missions need to hear tonight are the other conditions. What is the government's commitment to aid? There is no point in sending our military for an additional two years if this House does not hear from the government that it will be committing the amount of aid necessary to rebuild Afghanistan and recreate Afghanistan.

Government Orders

I hope I will hear from the foreign affairs minister or the defence minister about how we are rebuilding governance structures, how we are dealing with corruption and how we are dealing with other issues.

If we do approve the mission for two years, I would like to know from the government what role the House will play as we go forward. Is the government saying that it wants a blank cheque?

The defence committee tried to pass a resolution the other day to be involved in matters and we were told that this would not be dealt with through the defence committee. If this goes ahead, I thought I heard the Prime Minister say earlier, in answer to a question, that there would be regular updates to the House but I did not hear that tonight.

We have not been told about other things. What are the necessary benchmarks? We have been told, for example, that 2009 was chosen because that is the end of Mr. Karzai's term. What about the problems of corruption, the Pakistan source of insurgents? What about the difficult issue of other missions? I hope the defence minister will help us this evening by telling us that the government recognizes that Afghanistan cannot be the only focus of our military activities.

If there is a crisis in Haiti or a crisis in Darfur where we can make a contribution, will the government give us its assurance that it will be possible for us to respond as Canada must respond? That is why we always had short missions before and why we insisted that we have flexibility to go in and help.

Before I can make a decision tonight I need to hear a response, and I beg the defence minister to give us the facts, on whether we will be able to respond to those missions as a responsible country. Those are the issues we need to deal with.

Let me comment on the process, as the member from Markham did. We had a debate on this before. We know there is no constitutional need for this debate. Is this debate and this particular vote, held in these circumstances, one for political gain or is it to support our troops on missions?

•(1625)

[*Translation*]

For example, if I understood correctly, yesterday our Bloc Québécois colleagues supported the mission. But today they no longer support it because their motion was defeated in committee.

Everyone is trying to take part, but if roadblocks are thrown up at every turn, it is hard.

We have very little time. We hear that the Dutch parliament had 10 weeks; we have just six hours.

[*English*]

So much of what we heard today from the Prime Minister was for the first time.

We heard of Mr. Karzai's request.

We heard from the Prime Minister that a one year mandate is a possible consideration by the government. I think if the government had put to us a one year mandate, I honestly believe it would have

got more support from members of the House. It would have been more understandable than a blank cheque for two years. Why now spring one year on us in the middle of the debate?

We hear for the first time about the leadership of ISAF from Jane Taber in the *Globe and Mail*.

[*Translation*]

Our caucus had only a few hours to discuss the motion that this government has put before the House this evening. We had a good discussion. A number of different opinions were expressed, and some common points were made. The Liberal caucus firmly supports our troops. We firmly believe in the current mission and the global goals. We also firmly believe that the government's process will not allow many parliamentarians to make an informed decision about this crucial issue. It is unfair to place parliamentarians in this position.

That said, I can speak on behalf of my caucus. We are here, and we have an opportunity to vote for or against this motion this evening, depending on what the government says. We will take part in this debate. We will listen to the government's arguments, and each of our members will vote according to the information we receive from the government.

[*English*]

All our members will exercise their parliamentary responsibility. Our duties to our constituents and to this august House demand no less.

I have listened to the Prime Minister. I will listen to the defence minister. I will listen to other members of the House. I will vote in favour of this mission if they satisfy me on those issues I referred to, because I believe I can only in conscience vote if in fact we are getting that right assurance, and I will vote for the mission.

But let there be no doubt. The responsibility for this process lies squarely with the government. We could have had a committee. We could have had more time. We had to negotiate the amount of time we got. Surely members opposite, in good faith, would want more time to discuss this.

Certainly no vote in the House in these circumstances could ever be interpreted as a lack of support for our troops. Let us not descend into jingoism. Let us try to find out what is best for our country and, sincerely, what is best for our troops.

I end as I began. We have seldom participated in a debate so important for our troops and for our country. I know that our members on our side will vote their conscience when we have heard the government case.

For myself, like the member for Markham, I hope the government will make that case, because we believe in this mission, but I know each and every member of the House will be seeking guidance from whatever individual divine inspiration they choose to seek.

I know also that they will vote in a way that is true to our country, to our troops in this mission, in a way in which we, who happen to live in one of the most fortunate countries in the world, can help those less fortunate than ourselves, who may be half a world away, but who are also part of our human family.

Government Orders

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed with the comments of the Leader of the Opposition. His party and his former government made that commitment to the Afghani people, and they made it for the right reasons. That is the fascinating thing about this. They made it for the right reasons and we have been there for several years.

The hon. member says we could have had a committee on this. I want to point out to him that he did not have a committee to look at it when his party committed Canadian troops to the area to help rebuild that country. His party did not commit to having a vote on it. His party did not commit to having any of those things.

This debate and vote is a step forward in engaging the Parliament of Canada. I want to point out that this process we have here today had the unanimous consent of everybody. All 308 members of the House of Commons unanimously agreed yesterday that this was a good process, that this was something they wanted Parliament to debate.

For them now to say that in 26 hours they have changed their minds is a bit much, and let me tell the House that it sends out exactly the wrong message to the men and women who are fighting on our behalf in Afghanistan and to the Afghani people.

Now those members do not know why we are there. They do not have enough information. Good heavens, that party has supported this mission for years. What information did they have then? I can quote the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He said that it is a dangerous mission, one that is crucial to our efforts to help bring peace and security to the people of Afghanistan.

That was in March, so I want to know, what has changed in the last 26 hours?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1630)

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the Leader of the Opposition, I want to say that whatever the right message is, our troops will not feel honoured or supported by the notion that we spent all afternoon yelling at each other.

I recognize the leader of Her Majesty's official opposition.

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member takes us back to the commitment that we made when we were in government, the commitment that I personally have defended on many occasions, but I have to tell the member that the defence of course was based on those conditions and on that year's commitment.

What I am seeking to hear from the government today is not these sorts of political accusations going back and forth. What I and other members of the House are honestly and sincerely seeking from the government is answers to our questions, which we have only been given six hours to get, and those questions relate to, for example, what is the relationship to the aid project? Are we making progress on the governance issues? Will the House, if we extend the mission for two years, continually be kept abreast of matters through the committee?

These are legitimate questions. These are not irresponsible positions to be taking. These are legitimate questions, and if I get satisfactory answers, let me make it very clear that I will be voting for this mission. But I think the government has to take some responsibility and say to the members of the House, "We will give the answers that are needed in order for members to do their job and tell their constituents and the troops for whom they are responsible that we are making sure the conditions in which they are being sent to war are appropriate".

That is all we ask. That is what our democracy demands. I beg of the government to give it to us.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member will agree, as would everyone in the House, that Canada has pulled its weight in Afghanistan. We have carried a major load in rebuilding that country.

The concern the New Democrats have had is whether a mission should be initiated where we continue to fly under Operation Enduring Freedom. I think the U.S. styled counter-insurgency methods of this operation are fundamentally different from where the Canadian army has gone and where many of the Canadian people are comfortable going.

I would like to bring to the member's attention the fact that right now the Canadian government has publicity ads in the Washington subways with what I think is a fairly cheap slogan, "Boots on the Ground", ads for a Canadian website, CanadianAlly.com, where we have all kinds of nice facts about trade with the U.S.

So there is a question I have to ask the member. How comfortable is he knowing that our troops are in harm's way while the government is promoting trade by the fact that our troops are on the ground fighting a U.S. style counter-insurgency?

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to disagree with the hon. member, but as for his information, and perhaps the defence minister will elucidate for the House, my understanding is that one of the reasons our troops are doing this mission and why we agreed to the first year is precisely because we can move from Operation Enduring Freedom into NATO. That in fact was one of the attractive assets of the mission.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: We haven't done it yet.

Hon. Bill Graham: The member for Halifax disagrees with that, but I have always understood this to be the case. This is not a problem that I have with this mission. In fact, if we had gone for a one year extension, I might well have very quickly been able to say yes. It clearly is related to that.

The problem is around the two years and the uncertainty around those other issues that other members here on our side of the House have to get an understanding for. If the government chooses to use our participation in Afghanistan to promote relations with the United States, it is obviously up to the government as to whether it feels that it is appropriate. I do not think that is an issue for debate tonight.

Government Orders

What I need to know so that we can have an informed vote tonight in a matter of a few hours is whether we can get assurances from the government so that we will be satisfied on our key issues about aid, governance and reports to the House, which will enable us to have a coherent policy in Afghanistan and a coherent parliamentary participation as that policy goes forward.

• (1635)

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly endorse your comments about keeping the debate at a high level tonight because, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, our troops in Afghanistan listen to every word that gets said in this House of Commons in reference to their mission. Hopefully everybody in this House will remember that as they go through this evening's debate.

The member opposite is asking for the commitments. I think the Prime Minister has indicated another \$310 million, for a total of \$1 billion, to help with the reconstruction. He has talked about the refugees coming back into the country. He has talked about children going to school. He has talked about women's rights being restored, about education, about clean water. The very basics of life are being provided, plus there is an opportunity for a future.

Surely even the NDP could vote to support such action. This is what our men and women in uniform are doing in that country. I think it is just amazing that people can stand up here and discuss and argue about the details of how the debate was structured or the timing of it. That is ridiculous.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rick Casson: It is ridiculous. We ought to stand in this House and support our troops, because if we do not, they are listening to every word.

I would like to ask the Leader of the Opposition a question. He was the minister responsible, the minister of defence, when this country went into Afghanistan. There is a commitment until the year 2010 that he is very well aware of, the Afghanistan Compact, a commitment for everybody to be involved, for 51 nations to get involved to bring stability back to that country. How can we do it one year at a time?

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that our troops watch these debates. I agree that everybody in today's world watches the debates and anybody will on the Internet. This is certainly one reason why I believe that our language, as the hon. member and others have suggested, must be very careful. We must be very careful that we do not say things which in any way would give anyone in Afghanistan the thought that we are not committed to helping the Afghan people. That certainly has always been our position.

On the hon. member's comment to us now about the amount of aid, it is illustrative of one of the problems we are having in the debate. This number he has just given to me of \$310 million and \$1 billion over a period of time—I am not sure what period of time—is not a number that I picked up from the Prime Minister's speech. I was listening carefully to it. Others say not. I myself will verify that during the course of the debate. That goes a long way to making sure that we have the right type of information.

That is exactly the type of thing which I hope we will be getting from this debate, an informed debate, an honest, intellectual struggle on the part of all of us to find out what is the best thing we can do for our troops and what is the best thing we can use them for in a way that would further Afghanistan.

I thank the hon. member for his comment. I will certainly research that amount for the aid program. That certainly is helpful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to offer my most sincere sympathies to the family of Nichola Goddard, who died today in Afghanistan.

This tragic end of a woman who worked to build a better world should remind us that the debate we are undertaking today deals with a serious question. The question is actually to decide whether we should extend the presence of men and women who are risking their lives in Afghanistan. The real question deals with the renewal for two years of Canada's military commitment in Afghanistan. The Bloc Québécois will vote against the extension of this mission.

Sending men and women to risk their lives is a decision laden with very heavy consequences, which cannot, and which should not, be taken lightly. This decision should be made in full knowledge of the facts. We should therefore be able to answer certain questions.

Is such an intervention justified, necessary and realistic? Do the people who will risk their lives have the necessary means to carry out the mission that we wish to assign them? What exactly is the nature of the Canadian military commitment? Is there a specific schedule and a withdrawal plan should the situation become uncontrollable?

In connection with Canada's current commitment in Afghanistan, we did not get answers to all our questions. But we have enough knowledge and certainty to support it. That is what the Bloc Québécois is doing.

The intervention is justified, if for no other reason than to ensure the security of Afghans, those who have lived in insecurity for such a long time, and to rebuild this ravaged country and rebuild its government. The intervention is realistic since, to our knowledge, it has received the support of the Afghan people and government. The soldiers have the necessary means and there are enough troops to fulfill this mandate until February 2007. We know the nature of Canada's commitment, and there is a specific deadline, that is, February 2007. All this enables us to support the current mission.

Do we have enough answers to support an additional two-year extension? Definitely not. For this reason, the Bloc Québécois has asked the Standing Committee on National Defence to study all these questions. Do we have an idea of the real duration of the mission in Afghanistan? Will it be 10 years, as the Chief of Staff has implied, or 20 years, as a former major-general affirms. Likewise, can we have an estimate of the cost of the mission? There is talk of \$2 billion. Is this realistic? Does this figure include all the costs: premiums paid to the soldiers, the increased maintenance of equipment or the purchase of new equipment? What are the criteria used to measure the success of the mission?

Government Orders

Beyond the show of visits by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, this government has to be able to tell the public whether we are making progress or not. What is the strategy for achieving peace and for rebuilding in that country? What importance is being given to development assistance? How can we ensure that rebuilding activities in Afghanistan will not be marginalized by strictly military activities?

The answer to this crisis cannot and must not be strictly military. What about the treatment of civilians, the effectiveness of the convention on the treatment of prisoners signed with the Afghan government and the use of antipersonnel mines?

On November 15, 2005, the official opposition critic asked a series of questions that remain unanswered. One of those questions concerned an exit plan in case the mission takes a bad turn. Does the minister have such a plan? Under what circumstances, if any, would he consider withdrawing?

• (1640)

What guarantee do we have of avoiding a hard line approach to this issue?

The national defence critic who asked all those questions, which everyone felt were legitimate, was none other than the current Minister of National Defence. I believe it is legitimate for us to ask the very same questions without being considered disloyal to the soldiers in Afghanistan.

This minister who asked all those questions, a career soldier, is not answering his own questions today. As long as we do not get answers to our questions, the Bloc Québécois will not support a renewed military commitment by Canada in Afghanistan.

In his typical fashion, the Prime Minister has decided to call a rushed vote on extending Canada's military commitment. It was, "There will be a vote or I will decide without a vote". That is why we agreed to have a vote. However, just because we agreed to have a vote does not mean we will vote absolutely in favour. That is not what democracy is all about.

By rushing matters, the Prime Minister is being irresponsible, in my opinion. This shows a lack of respect for the House of Commons, parliamentarians and the public. It is offensive.

I do not believe, and I have never believed, that issues of war and peace should be based on partisan or electioneering considerations. We do not send men and women to fight wars and risk their lives so lightly. To take such an approach to issues like these is petty politicking, very petty politicking. This is a serious matter, one that deserves our full attention, thorough debate and careful thought. Certainly, once the matter is resolved and a decision has been made, we must stand firm on that decision and live with it. That is what we did regarding Canada's current presence in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the Prime Minister has decided to rush things. He has placed his party politics ahead of government policy. That is unforgivable on the part of a prime minister.

Even worse, the Prime Minister is trying to use Parliament to endorse a decision about which the public has very serious reservations. The public cannot be accused of not understanding

all the issues and opposing participation by Canada when it is not being offered clear and adequate answers.

Before seeking the support of Parliament, the support of the people must be sought, because members of Parliament express the will of the people. That is the primary role and duty of government. In rushing to a vote, the Prime Minister is refusing to explain himself and to persuade the public.

Demonstrating leadership does not just mean making decisions quickly, as the Prime Minister likes to do. It also means persuading and explaining. Any authoritarian leader can impose decisions.

The Prime Minister says that he wants members' unflinching support for the men and women deployed in Afghanistan. I am convinced that all the elected members assembled here support the troops of Canada and Quebec and that they will do everything in their power to help them perform their duties. However, that is not what the government is asking us to do today. It is asking us to blindly give it a blank check for years to come.

The government wants us to be a rubber stamp. For the Bloc Québécois, rubber stamping, abstaining from doing its duty in the way it should be done, responsibly and carefully, is out of the question.

The Bloc Québécois will not write any blank check to the Prime Minister or the government. As you know, I myself was in favour of an intervention in Afghanistan. I was deeply disgusted by the atrocities committed against women by the Taliban, to cite one example. The dynamiting of the statues of Buddha, for those who remember, showed a very disturbing fanaticism. Afghanistan had become a place of chaos and terror where inhumanity was triumphing. Certainly the attacks of September 11 were the straw, in fact the bale, that broke the camel's back. All of the western nations rallied to support the United States.

• (1645)

At that time the international community made a commitment to ousting the Taliban regime, guaranteeing security and helping to rebuild this country scarred by successive wars.

I am proud that the Bloc Québécois supported this international intervention, as I am proud of our support for the intervention in Kosovo which helped put an end to the Balkan war.

Many of my colleagues know my convictions on these matters. I am deeply convinced that, in certain situations, armed intervention is necessary. That was the case in Rwanda, in 1994, and we failed in our task. It was necessary in Kosovo, in 1998, and we assumed our responsibilities.

It is very difficult to make these sorts of decisions. Often it is unpopular, but unfortunately, sometimes it is necessary. As a parliamentarian and party leader, I have not hesitated, and will not hesitate in future, to make such decisions, even if they should prove unpopular. We in this House are politicians. We are very aware of public opinion, and it is healthy that we should be.

Government Orders

As I was saying a little earlier, however, one cannot make such a decision on partisan grounds. Of course, we represent the people—in the Bloc's case, the people of Quebec. In a democracy, we have to take that into account; in fact, it is a democratic imperative. We are also responsible for making decisions that may be unpopular. There are certain fundamental issues which require us to do so. So we have to consider popular opinion, but cannot let our attitude be dictated by that alone. For it sometimes happens that, to serve the common good, we must act contrary to public opinion.

Neither should we forget the context of this intervention in Afghanistan. In the face of terrorism, a military response is neither sufficient nor satisfactory, but it is necessary. Destroying bin Laden and his confederates is one thing. Destroying terrorism is another. One has to go after its causes, which are poverty, the absence of democracy, dictatorship, and the abysmal ignorance that these things breed. These causes are no justification for the fanaticism we have witnessed. But we must realize that these causes are the fertile ground that permits fanaticism and terrorism to grow.

As for the military commitment, it was necessary to intervene and necessary to offer logistical support and, above all, humanitarian aid. We must be clear about the role of the Canadian army before making decisions that commit us for a number of years. Humanitarian aid, logistical support and intervention in peacekeeping missions seem to me the priorities that would permit the Canadian army to play a useful role, without ruling out purely military intervention.

It is the fate of the Afghan people that must guide our decision. It is also the nature of the role that Canada can and must play. It is also and above all the fate that awaits the men and women who will risk their lives in Afghanistan. We know that some will lose their lives there, that caskets will be coming back to Canada, that there will be funerals. So it is a serious decision that we will be making as we vote. There will be tearful mothers, widows and widowers, and orphans in our own constituencies.

We must and we will answer for our decisions. How can we be answerable if the decision is hasty and made without having answers to our questions?

Fortunately, the Bloc Québécois asked the Standing Committee on National Defence to take a good look at all these questions. The Prime Minister is rushing things, though, and requiring us to decide before we have the answers. How can we in all decency send people to risk their lives when we are not even sure that it will be for good reasons? What assurance is there that two or three years from now, the situation in Afghanistan will not have turned into a nightmare? If this happens, who can guarantee that this government will not decide to stay for purely strategic reasons and justify the war by this vote in the House? How can we decide to send young people to risk their lives when we do not know whether they will be sent in good conditions?

After such massive participation on Canada's part, who can assure us that after another three years, there will be enough Canadian troops and they will not be exhausted, totally worn out? For the time being, the government is counting on a hypothetical increase in troop numbers. But what assurance is there that these objectives will be reached when only yesterday the Auditor General underlined the army's chronic inability to reach its targets?

● (1650)

How can I, as a member of Parliament, ask someone to risk his life without knowing whether there is an exit plan if things take a serious turn for the worse? What will this government do if the people of Afghanistan turn against the international presence? We cannot ignore Afghan history. I cannot in all conscience ask someone to risk his life without a firm conviction based on specific answers and clear decisions.

We cannot agree to send human beings to risk their lives in this way just because our arms are being twisted and even though we are totally in the dark. We must act responsibly and refuse to blindly sign this blank cheque that the Prime Minister wants from us. I therefore ask the elected members of this House to vote against the Prime Minister's motion.

When he was leader of the official opposition, the Prime Minister stated that governments should respect the decisions of the House of Commons. I ask him, therefore, to abide by his own principles and respect the decision that the House of Commons is going to make on the motion that he himself introduced and I encourage him to participate actively in the Standing Committee on National Defence so that we have the information we need to make a wise decision.

● (1655)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the statement made by the leader of the Bloc Québécois deserves our full consideration. The leader of the Bloc Québécois began by stating that what is at issue is basically whether to prolong the mission. I understand, and I agree with him that that is exactly right. However, he spent 15 or 20 minutes contradicting what he said at the beginning. He called the Prime Minister irresponsible. I wonder what this is really about.

Some time ago, the leader of the Bloc Québécois asked for a debate on this issue. Now we have one. He asked for a vote. We have had one.

An hon. member: There will be one.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I must add that the Prime Minister explained very clearly in his statement the reasons why we are in Afghanistan. We are there because President Karzai asked us to renew the mission.

The leader of the Bloc Québécois asked for an explanation and he got one. He said we acted too quickly. We know that for the four years the Liberal Party was in power, they were in a position to provide an explanation, but they just beat around the bush. We have enough information to move forward and justify our participation, information that comes directly from President Karzai, as well as from our NATO allies and other partners over there.

My question for the leader of the Bloc Québécois is this: If he supports these values overall, why is he again renegeing on his promise to support our forces, our troops in Afghanistan?

Government Orders

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal with each of these elements in turn. Yes, we wanted a vote and we will have one. But that does not mean we are automatically going to vote the same way as those who gave us the opportunity to vote. That is not logical. There will be a vote, and I appreciate that, but as I said, the Bloc Québécois will vote no.

As for renegeing on my promise, I told the Prime Minister that there were a number of questions that needed answers. If the answers were satisfactory, we could support extending the mission, as we did in 2001 and when this House debated the current mission 10 days or two weeks ago.

The questions I mentioned are the ones that were asked on November 15—not so long ago—by the official opposition defence critic, who a few months ago became the defence minister. I do not feel it is too much to ask the current minister to answer the questions he himself asked in the past. I think it is necessary so that we can make a decision.

It was with this constructive attitude that the Bloc introduced a motion in the standing committee on national defence last Thursday. The Prime Minister says that nothing changed until we met this week, on Monday if I remember correctly. Either the Prime Minister forgot something or he did not know and had not done his homework.

The Prime Minister must be aware that a motion was introduced in the standing committee on national defence and that it addressed essentially the same issues raised by the current defence minister.

When I met with the Prime Minister, I asked him to answer those questions and to join in that motion, which was passed yesterday. When the Prime Minister announced that a vote would be held today, he was in a position to know that a motion had been introduced and would be voted on before today's vote took place. Things happened in that order. I take full responsibility for what I did. I acted responsibly and did not try to force matters for purposes other than the situation of those who are fighting for freedom in Afghanistan.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us make it clear right now that no matter how the vote goes tonight, all members of Parliament support our brave men and women in Afghanistan in the work that they are doing.

I have a question for the member. Has he ever seen such a shameful affront to Parliament? I respect the Prime Minister as a long standing parliamentarian, but has the member ever seen a prime minister put a motion before the House and then in his speech say the government would not necessarily follow the results of the vote and might do the exact opposite? He said the government would extend the mission anyway, regardless of the vote.

Did he not in his speech with this new information, which was a surprise and an affront to Parliament, make it hard to vote yes? What he basically said in his speech was that the mission was going to be extended for one year and eight months from today, if the House votes no. How could any member of Parliament vote yes when a no vote would mean we are extending the mission for one year and

eight months from today? To vote yes would mean two years and eight months.

Why would even the Conservatives not vote for a motion that says we are going to extend the mission to one year and eight months? By voting no today we could re-evaluate and decide whether to go forward. The best vote would be no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, during all of my time here, this is the first time I have seen a Prime Minister propose a vote and then say that, if the outcome is not what he had hoped, he would not respect the vote.

Actually, this is the second time I have seen this. I watched as Prime Minister Jean Chrétien called a vote on an agreement, the Kyoto protocol, but that was unusual. I must hand it to the current Prime Minister: calling a vote on a decision to send troops overseas or on an international agreement at least marks an improvement over the previous Liberal governments, which refused to allow the House to vote on such issues. I give the current Prime Minister credit for this.

In my opinion, the much wiser decision would be to follow our proposal. I do not see why the government will not agree to the request of the Standing Committee on National Defence to revisit the questions raised by the current defence minister here in this House on November 15, 2005 and give him the opportunity to answer those questions himself. We would then return here and, based on his answers, make an informed decision about whether to extend the mission. However, we need more information. I see nothing wrong with asking the same questions as the current minister did in the past.

[*English*]

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I strongly suspect that the debate this evening is going to get quite heated after hearing some of the comments being made. This is an issue that obviously many of us get very emotional about when it comes to the military, myself in particular. Although I have never had the privilege of serving, I feel very strongly about this issue, as I think a lot of members do from all parties.

I would ask the leader of the Bloc Québécois to comment on the possibility of the vote going against the government's motion tonight. We have heard that the government is going to ignore the vote anyway. That is not the case, as has been revealed. The reality is that we have made a commitment not only to our men and women in uniform but to our allies and the people of Afghanistan that we will be there.

The hypocrisy of the Liberals is unbelievable tonight. What would the Liberals have us do? What would the leader of the Bloc Québécois have us do? Would they have us put our people on the plane tomorrow morning and just abandon our commitment? There obviously must be a transition period and that is what the Prime Minister was remarking about.

• (1705)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, before making a commitment it might be a good idea to consult the House first. That would be realistic and responsible.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

I would also like to say to my colleague that the mission ends in February 2007. There is no question of bringing people back now. Nobody said that. There should be enough time to permit the Standing Committee on National Defence to assess the situation. That is the way to go.

It is irresponsible to say that in the future we will undertake commitments, that there will be a vote and that, if we do not like the outcome, only half of the commitment will be honoured. This sort of behaviour in matters of national defence or military intervention or international affairs, would make the government look as ridiculous as it does right now in connection with the environment.

It is fine to have a vote here. However, let the government assume all its responsibilities and make sure Parliament as a whole cooperates, particularly as it is in a minority situation. Let it be sure that it does not consider committees to be extracurricular activities and that it recognizes decisions are made there. The decisions taken in the House should be respected, in so far as it believes in democracy.

If the Prime Minister travels to Afghanistan and tells its leaders that they need a democratic parliament, he will also have to tell them that they should not do as is done here, where he does not respect the decisions made by Parliament.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

As I begin, I wish to express, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, our profound sadness in learning today that Captain Nichola Goddard, based in Shilo, Manitoba, has been killed in service to our country in Afghanistan. Our thoughts and our prayers are with Captain Goddard's family, friends and all members of the Canadian Forces serving our country at home and abroad.

New Democrats stand in opposition to the government's plans to lock our country into a long term, war-fighting role in Afghanistan, a role that does not properly reflect the principles and ideals of the people of Canada.

For nearly five decades, Canada has pursued peace in nations around the world and brought hope to lives torn apart by war. From the Suez Canal to Cyprus, from the Sinai to the former Yugoslavia, Canada has built a reputation as a respected peacekeeping nation. Canada is not a super power but as a middle power, we have long punched above our weight, as they say, because our contribution to the world as peacekeepers, with resolve to uphold the commitment of multilateralism through the United Nations, has always been fundamental.

Our foreign policy must reflect the reality that we are a country renowned for our pursuit of peace. We are a nation of facilitators, not occupiers. We are a people committed to the ideals of building bridges, not burning them. We must not allow that legacy of good work to falter in the growing shadow of the Bush administration's Operation Enduring Freedom.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

It is far too convenient to pretend that each new mission is simply an extension of the previous mission. The government is not asking for an extension, but a commitment to a new mission that will last till the end of the decade.

Some people, on either side of the House, will claim that everything will be lost if Canada redirects its energy after four years in Afghanistan. Some people are prepared to see Canada stuck in Afghanistan until the end of the decade and beyond. According to them, doing less than that amounts to turning one's back on the problem. In truth, Canada's military contribution has been considerable, considering our capacities.

[*English*]

Afghanistan is now the largest recipient of Canadian overseas development assistance. The NDP unequivocally supports the continuation of this funding. We fully support an ongoing development and diplomatic role for Canada in Afghanistan, but the government has tied war-making and aid together in this motion, and we oppose that.

New Democrats, indeed all Canadians, value our country's principled place in the world as a nation that seeks peace not conflict. There is a role well-suited for Canada to play in Afghanistan, but it is not the role that the government has narrowly thrust upon the nation in this motion.

We must also bear in mind that because of the unilateral decisions of the Prime Minister and the Liberals before him, Canada has been rendered incapable of further serious contributions around the world.

Despite hard-won debates and months of questioning in the House, the government, like the Liberal government before it, has refused to answer the questions that we have asked. What is the effective command and control structure? What are the goals and objectives of this mission and how do they meet Canada's foreign policy objectives? What is the definition of success in this mission? What is our exit strategy?

When the Conservatives were in opposition, they asked these legitimate questions, and they received no answers from the Liberals. Just a few weeks ago New Democrats asked these same questions in the House, and have received no answers. Canadians deserve these answers.

As any officer in our Canadian Forces will tell us, time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted. The government, like its Liberal predecessor, is not interested in due diligence. It is interested in merely satisfying the optics of consent.

[*Translation*]

The New Democrats have not written a blank cheque so that this government, or any other government, can drag Canada still farther into war, so that it can remove us farther from our role as international peacekeepers.

Government Orders

The Prime Minister and his government are entitled to blindfold the members in this House, to tie their hands and to conduct this mock debate. Canadians, however, will not be blind. In spite of your intimidation, we will not accept the unacceptable.

[*English*]

Time after time I have stood in my place and have asked the Prime Minister directly to fully inform Canadians about our role in Afghanistan. Time after time I am sad to say, the Prime Minister has stood in his place and refused to answer these questions. Instead he has proclaimed, in no uncertain terms, that if we question the mission, we are against our troops.

Let me be very clear. Canadians will not be lured into this false trap created by the Prime Minister's borrowed sloganeering. It is an injustice to democracy that we ask Canada's young men and women in uniform to defend, with their lives, when the government confuses patriotism with jingoism.

We will take no lessons from the government on supporting our women and men in uniform. Let us all remember that last year it was the Conservatives who voted against a budget that invested \$13.5 billion in the Canadian Forces, a budget that invested \$8.2 billion more than the Conservatives' budget this spring. It was New Democrats, not Conservatives, who voted for that budget and made sure it passed to ensure that our troops would get the equipment and training they needed and the financial support over the long term. That is how our party shows support for our troops.

Just this week the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore stood in his place and asked why, after 14 years, the government continued to deny benefits to the widow of a soldier who died in uniform and why the government continued to let lawyers fight to keep that family from receiving the support they deserved. That is how the government shows its support for our troops.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

If we ask this country to go on waging war, every Canadian citizen must understand all the facts. Our troops deserve to know what we are asking them to do. The families deserve to know what we are asking of their sons and daughters. If there is one aspect of our public discourse that should be absolutely free of any partisan proclamation, it is our foreign policy. That also applies when we decide on our troops' missions by asking them to defend our values and perhaps even give their lives.

It is the responsibility of every member in this House to ask hard questions, and it is the responsibility of the government to answer them.

[*English*]

There is an immense debate in NATO countries like Britain and the Netherlands right now about the future mission in Afghanistan. In Canada the government is trying to ram through a motion, with no room for amendment, no option for clarity. The government does not really seek a debate, but rather a rubber stamp from the House to commit the Canadian Forces to a new and highly uncertain and ill-defined mission. It is not in the interests of Canadians to blindly

allow our country to be locked into a new long term commitment in Afghanistan.

New Democrats will stand against the motion because we believe the new mission, defined so poorly by the government, is not in line with the values and principles held by Canadians. It is not the right role to pursue the objectives of Canada's foreign policy.

New Democrats asked for this debate and vote. We welcomed the opportunity to stand and defend Canada's place in the world. I ask members of the House to join us. Let our country set the standard. Let Canada lead and not follow. Let us forge our own path in the world, a path that builds upon our strengths and reflects globally the values and principles of the pursuit of peace that define us nationally.

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will keep my questions quite short because many others want to join in the debate and ask the member some questions.

Does the hon. member not understand the contradiction in his comments when he states that he and his party stand unequivocally in support of foreign aid, but they would have us renege on our commitment to the Afghan people to provide the soldiers to provide the protection so foreign aid can be delivered to the Afghan people? How in God's earth does he think that the foreign aid would continue to flow to help the Afghan people rebuild their nation if the soldiers are not there to allow it to flow to the people who need it?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, perhaps Adeena Niazi of the Afghan Women's Organization of Toronto can say it better than I. She says that Afghans love the Canadians who bring security, peace and development. They do not support the combat mission. It is making Afghanistan more violent. She asked the question, "How can you bring peace when you are bringing war?"

The fact is the engagement, development and diplomacy, with security support, with a proper balance, has been something our party has supported. The proposition in front of us is very different. There is an amount identified by the Prime Minister, for instance, for development aid. It is interesting that he does not provide the amounts that would be required to support the war-fighting effort, which is bound to be dramatically more than the funds being requested for aid. I think that says it all.

• (1720)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the sentiments expressed earlier by the member for Yukon. We support of the mission and we support our military, properly trained and equipped.

The motion, based on the speech of the Prime Minister, seems to be a bit of a moving target. From that speech, it is clear that now there is more details and information, but if there is a negative vote, all of a sudden he will extend it for one year, with the threat that the government will pull the plug and look for an election.

Government Orders

Is it hon. member understanding that the deployment of military is an executive decision alone and that the motion before the House is not binding on the government? If that is the case, why are we now debating and having a vote to somehow legitimize something without the same kind of briefings that the executive would have received from CIDA, foreign affairs and defence?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, our party has advocated for some considerable time the idea that when our troops are deployed in international activities, the House should be drawn into that discussion and have the opportunity to vote on the issue. We have pressed for that for some time.

When the current Prime Minister was the leader of the opposition, I can recall that we discussed these matters and we were in accord on this question. After becoming Prime Minister, he abandoned the notion that a vote was appropriate. I am pleased that he has now decided once again that a vote is appropriate.

We understand the nature of that vote and that it is advisory. We also understand it is important and the government of the day should be following the advice of the House of Commons. Sadly, in these last few days we have seen many indications that the government does not seem willing to follow that fundamental principle of democracy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all of the party leaders have stressed how important the debate we are engaged in is. I would like to ask the leader of the NDP whether he agrees that this House is in a paradoxical situation.

We are being asked to vote to extend one of the most important and most devastating missions in which Canada has participated in its entire history, but we have insufficient information. Does he agree that it would have been a good idea for the Standing Committee on National Defence, on a motion by the Bloc Québécois supported by his party—for which I thank him—to be able to do an investigation, do the analysis, in order to get additional information about the status of the mission? Does he agree that this House is truly in a totally senseless situation?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, we prefer that there be a study done by the Standing Committee on National Defence, so that the people who lead our military forces—and the government—can answer the very important questions that we have raised in this House but that have not received the answers we need. I agree, we are indeed in a paradoxical situation at this point. But the Prime Minister said that he wanted to go on, regardless of what this House decides, and I find that situation very sad.

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a member of Parliament, as the defence critic for the New Democratic Party, and also as a concerned Canadian citizen, mother and grandmother.

When I became defence critic four months ago, I did not know a lot about military affairs, but I had a guiding principle then and it remains my guiding principle today. After four months of total immersion in Canadian defence policy, I am more convinced than ever that military force must be used only as a last resort.

Military force is a blunt, dangerous and expensive instrument. It has profound, often negative consequences for the lives of individual human beings. Those individuals include the soldiers we send into harm's way, their husbands, their wives, their sons, their daughters, and yes, their mothers and fathers, as well as their grandmothers and grandfathers.

Never let us forget the grave responsibility we carry anytime we put the lives of young Canadians on the line. Is the mission necessary? Is it a mission that can succeed? Is it the right mission? Are we doing everything possible to ensure the safety and well-being of our soldiers? Are we doing everything possible to adhere to international standards concerning the protection of civilians, the choice and the use of weapons, and the treatment of detainees?

The decision to deploy a military force is a deadly serious one. We are not playing a video game. We must guard against becoming pumped full of aggression and testosterone, throwing caution to the wind, secure in the knowledge that we here as members of Parliament will never find ourselves in harm's way.

The NDP has serious concerns about the proposal to complete our mission in 2007 and then have a new mission for a further two years in Afghanistan. It is our responsibility as members of Parliament to voice those concerns. We are not afraid to vote against this motion. Our concerns have been inadequately addressed. It is our right. It is our responsibility. The government has not addressed our serious concerns. It has failed to answer our questions.

For four years the U.S. military, the most powerful military in the world, has tried to stabilize southern Afghanistan at the point of a gun through a forward leaning, counter-insurgency approach. The U.S. military has failed in that effort. The situation has become more, not less, dangerous. Osama bin Laden remains at large. Heroin production has skyrocketed. The insurgents are becoming ever more adept at building and deploying sophisticated roadside bombs.

Today the United States wants to draw down its forces in Afghanistan and it wants its allies to pick up the slack. Most of those allies, most of NATO, have been dragging their heels, concerned that the counter-insurgency approach creates more problems than it solves. Canada, however, has rushed into this gap, taking on the most dangerous mission in Afghanistan as part of the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Kandahar province.

The NDP shares the concerns of many of Canada's allies that the counter-insurgency approach cannot succeed, and if it cannot succeed, why are we there? Is it simply because the United States has asked us to be there because it wants out? Or is it simply because we do not have the imagination or wherewithal to devise a better approach? Or is it because we do not want to be elsewhere on a different, less macho, more explicitly humanitarian mission, saving the people of Darfur from a full-blown genocide?

Government Orders

Afghanistan is the largest recipient of Canadian overseas development assistance. The NDP unequivocally supports the continuation of that funding, especially when it supports the work of non-governmental aid organizations operating at arm's length from foreign military forces whenever possible.

• (1725)

Afghanistan is a large and diverse country that offers many opportunities for the deployment of reconstruction teams made up of a mix of Canadian Forces, CIDA, foreign affairs and RCMP personnel. The NDP unequivocally supports the maintenance of a sizeable Canadian reconstruction presence in Afghanistan. However, as the leader of our party has explained, the NDP believes that the extension of the counter-insurgency mission is not the best use that could be made of Canada's small but highly skilled professional army.

Genocide is occurring in Darfur. Yesterday the UN Security Council charged Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, to find countries willing and able to commit troops and equipment for that all important humanitarian mission. Canada is able to answer that call with the best soldiers in the world and equipment designed specifically for robust peacekeeping, unless we vote today to extend the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan.

Turning our backs on genocide is not a decision that we should take lightly or in haste. It is not a decision that should be pre-empted by a snap vote after only six hours of debate and no consideration by parliamentary committees. It is a decision that strikes at the very heart of what this country is and what we as Canadians believe.

The NDP has other concerns about the extension of the counter-insurgency mission in southern Afghanistan. We remain concerned about Canadian soldiers transferring detainees to Afghan or U.S. custody without adequate protections for Canada's continuing obligations to those detainees under international law. We remain concerned about Canadian soldiers relying on anti-personnel land mines laid by foreign forces in violation of the spirit and the intent of the Ottawa land mines convention.

We are also very concerned about the cost of this mission. By the time the current mission is complete in February 2007, it will have likely cost Canadians in excess of \$5 billion. The Polaris Institute has estimated that a two year extension or a new mission would cost an additional \$2 billion to \$3 billion.

We could provide a huge amount of reconstruction and humanitarian aid for \$7 billion, not just in Afghanistan but also elsewhere. As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, military force is a blunt, dangerous and expensive instrument. For \$7 billion it is incumbent upon us as guardians of the public purse to confirm that there is no alternative to the counter-insurgency approach and to ensure that this is the right mission.

Finally, the NDP is concerned about the continuing uncertainty over the timing for the transfer of overall operational control over Canada's soldiers from the U.S. military to NATO.

The motion before us states that Canada's commitment in Afghanistan is an important contribution with that of more than 30 other countries to international efforts under the auspices of the United Nations and NATO. But where is NATO? When the current

mission was decided upon last summer, the Liberals told us that Canadian Forces would be transferred to NATO operational control by this spring, by February. The transfer has been delayed, not once but several times. Today we read newspaper reports that Canada might well end up leading the NATO mission, presumably because no other NATO country wants the job.

It is a misleading motion before us. Our current commitment is under the auspices neither of the United Nations nor NATO. It is under Operation Enduring Freedom. In this situation, facing this uncertainty, the NDP could not in good conscience vote for it.

I have spoken today as a member of Parliament, as a citizen, as a mother and as a grandmother. The decision to use military force is one of the most important decisions a government could ever make. I repeat that this is not a video game. We are talking today about the lives of millions of people, Canadian lives, Afghan lives and the lives of the people of Darfur. We have to ensure that we make the very best decision, that this is the right mission and that all of us can in one, two or ten years look the families of our soldiers in the eye and say yes, it was a mission worth dying for.

• (1730)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it a little ironic to hear the member and her leader talk about military tactics.

Let me refer to Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. One of the principles is maintenance of the aim. One of the aims in Afghanistan is fighting for equality rights for Afghan women. One of the aims in Afghanistan is fighting for the extension of the democratic franchise in Afghanistan. One of the aims in Afghanistan is fighting for public education for all Afghan children and there are many more.

We talk about delivering funding and aid with no security. We cannot do that.

I would ask my hon. colleague, if not us, who, and if not now, when?

• (1735)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member, who is also on the defence committee, to look at the statements that Afghan women here in Canada have made exactly about the counter-insurgency role that Canadians are performing in Afghanistan. They have said it is not making Afghanistan a safer place for them. They are saying that it has raised the level of violence in Afghanistan. I think the voice of women in Afghanistan should be heard.

Mr. Art Hanger: Go over there and find out.

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Are you kidding me? Two-thirds of the country is under control now. Two thousand schools are now open.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the members who are yelling and carrying on over there that we have been at the forefront in asking for aid for Afghanistan for many years. We support in every way aid for Afghanistan.

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Who is going to deliver it?

Ms. Dawn Black: Canada has committed a lot. We have done a lot. We will continue to do a lot. This mission is not working.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): May I ask for a little bit of order during the rest of the questions and comments.

The hon. member for Guelph.

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked a lot about the hurried manner of what is happening here this evening. Indeed, I share those same concerns about the hurried manner. There are so many questions that have not been answered.

We do not know about the Darfur component. We do not know about the aid component. Even in question period today the Conservatives were confused about the exact amount of aid. We were getting different numbers and different components.

What is right for our troops? We do not know. We do not know what has been evaluated, what went right in this mission and what went wrong. We do not know all those things. Our own committee of the House has not looked at this.

I share the member's concerns that this is a very hurried process and it is an affront to our troops. It is a terrible thing.

At one time someone said that if we would not send our own children, then we should not do this. I would ask the hon. member to comment.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I have actually put myself through that thought process because I am a mother of three sons who are of an age that they could be part of the Canadian Forces. Two of my sons are police officers in Canada, so I know something about having sons who face danger in their lives every day.

I am not prepared to support this new mission in Afghanistan because we do not have answers to the questions. We know that the Americans have been fighting a counter-insurgency role for four years in Kandahar province and that the situation has only become worse.

Every independent analyst and in fact even the minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs have told us that it is far more dangerous now in Kandahar province than it has ever been. This is after the strongest military in the world has been fighting a counter-insurgency role there for four years.

In my view this is not the right mission. There are things we can do and have done in Afghanistan that have improved the lives of Afghan citizens and Afghan women. We commit as New Democrats to continue that kind of development diplomacy.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question for my colleague concerns the fact that this motion we are discussing today is not amendable.

Would my colleague comment on the fact that we cannot amend this motion? This is an unusual practice.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the whole process, with six hours to debate the issues of lives, destruction, war, and not have all the information that we should have before we make informed decisions, is shameful. I think the process is wrong. I think the fact that we vote up, down, with no amendments, is a mockery of democracy and disrespectful to our Canadian forces who are putting themselves in harm's way right now in Afghanistan.

● (1740)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to take part in the debate here this evening, a historic debate by all accounts, and I congratulate all members who have taken part this evening and who will take part.

This debate can be placed very much in the context of how much Canada has already accomplished by its commitment and its mission in Afghanistan. Afghanistan, as a country, in just over three years is impressive by any standard when we look at from where it came. Its GDP has doubled. Some 63,000 former combatants have been disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated. Approximately 11,000 heavy weapons have been removed and safely secured. A national police force is being built. Women are starting small businesses. Refugees have returned in the millions.

These are just statistics. There is much more that we have to examine in the context of what Canada is accomplishing. These statistics do not adequately convey the profound human dimensions of such striking progress. They do not capture the many individual triumphs that Afghans have achieved since 2001: the little girl that is going to school for the first time; the widow becoming self-sufficient; the voter being empowered by choice; and the family of refugees finally coming home.

I am privileged to say that I saw these people with my own eyes when I was in Afghanistan, to say that I looked into the eyes of a little girl in an Afghan school in Kabul, a school that was sponsored by the Canada Fund. It allowed young Afghans to go to school and receive vocational training, basic human skills of sanitation and discourse, reading and writing. This little girl would never have had that opportunity were it not for the intervention of the allies, including Canada. I asked that little girl what she liked about school and she said she enjoyed math. I said, "What do you want to do when you finish school?" She said, "I want to teach other little girls so they'll have this opportunity as well".

That is the human impact of Canadians being in Afghanistan today. Those opportunities would not exist. These are the exact Canadian values that we embrace in this country. What is more Canadian than ensuring that young women have that opportunity to go to school, be educated and lead productive lives?

Protecting and ensuring a safe home, a chance at education, free from exploitation or worse, violence, abuse, building democracies, these are all such important bedrock pillars of our society. Why would we not want to share this with the people of Afghanistan?

Canada is helping to create freedom from fear, a freedom that will allow ordinary Afghans to lead their daily lives without fear. I saw this directly during this visit to Kabul and Kandahar, a palpable sense of hope that after so many decades of devastation that country is well on its way to recovery and renewal.

Government Orders

My colleagues mentioned some of the other tangible impacts such as clean water. Thousands of schools are being opened. Millions of children are now able to attend school. The Afghans I met there, whether they were leaders, high level officials or ordinary Afghans, went out of their way to thank Canadians who were there, Canadian officials, to specifically express their gratitude for Canada's contributions. They also took the time to express their sympathies for our considerable sacrifices, meaning the lives of Canadian soldiers and diplomats who have given so much in the cause.

The president himself, Mr. Karzai, was particularly gracious in expressing that sentiment. He echoed the comments that I heard at numerous meetings, whether they be NATO meetings, EU meetings, or meetings with our allies generally. The Afghan people recognize, appreciate and commend Canada for its contribution to the cause of rebuilding Afghanistan.

They were all unanimous in expressing their deepest hope that we would not abandon them in this critical hour.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

After two and a half decades of conflict, the Afghans themselves have made considerable investments in their own future. The progress made has taken hard work, but positive change can be seen everywhere. Afghans enjoy opportunities that were inconceivable under the Taliban, including, and especially, for women and children, whose dignity had been systematically trampled under a repressive regime.

[*English*]

Now is not the time to capitulate. Now is the time to capitalize. It is fundamental that these institutions that have been built and the stability that is still being built are not abandoned at this critical time.

[*Translation*]

The foundations for responsible, effective Afghan management institutions have been laid: a constitution has been written, and a president, a parliament and 24 provincial councils elected. The country is now in a position to capitalize on this democratic progress, and large numbers of Afghan citizens are looking forward eagerly to the elections coming up in 2009. This is further evidence that our initial efforts will have lasting effect.

The Afghanistan Compact that was signed earlier this year at the London conference will provide a guide for the ongoing rebuilding of Afghanistan over the next five years. It lays down specific benchmarks for security, management and development, benchmarks that the Afghan government and the international community have agreed to pursue jointly, for example the destruction of all antipersonnel mines, the enactment of anti-corruption laws by the end of 2007, and a 20% increase in the number of women in the workforce by the end of 2010.

[*English*]

These are benchmarks that were identified and espoused by the Afghan government itself as the best way to ensure future security, good governance and prosperity for the Afghan people.

While Afghan authorities are working hard to build a truly national government, Afghanistan cannot yet move forward on its own. President Karzai and the Afghan government however recognize that sustained support will be required to reach these critical milestones. They expressed that to me in very emphatic terms, as they did to the Prime Minister during his very first visit abroad which took him to Afghanistan, a commendable and brave effort on the part of our national leader.

These are critical times for a truly remarkable man, President Karzai. This is the time for us to support him in this fashion. This is a president of vision, a president who is demonstrating exemplary leadership at a difficult time. He has asked specifically that Canada continue its commitment and demonstrate resolve. He recognizes, as we should recognize, that there is a responsibility to support Afghan state building efforts.

The international community undertook to help Afghanistan realize these goals with more than 60 delegations, including Canada, participating in a London conference on Afghanistan which was co-hosted by President Karzai, the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and U.K. Prime Minister Blair, on January 31, 2006. Strong, unambiguous support for the Afghanistan compact was expressed in London by our allies and included a thorough \$10.5 billion in pledges.

I want to speak to Canada's commitment and the Leader of the Opposition, who is a former minister of defence and of foreign affairs. He has asked some very specific questions which I hope to address in my remarks.

Canada's engagement in Afghanistan is an important part of the international effort to support Afghanistan as it does move forward. Alongside our Afghan, UN, NATO, and other international partners, we are working for clear, measurable results identified within the Afghan compact. Our common objective is to ensure that the people of Afghanistan and the country itself succeed in the vision of the compact as enunciated.

This is a considerable undertaking and that is why it is so important that we take our own international responsibility seriously. Canada has made a commitment to the United Nations to stay engaged in Afghanistan. We made a commitment to our allies and to NATO as part of the alliance's most important mission in its first out-of-area operation and a critical test of its ability to respond to a 21st century security challenge.

NATO as a security provider has played a vital role in the achievements to date and will remain key to the future progress of Afghanistan. Extending our engagement is in line with commitments made by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, our key partners along with others in southern Afghanistan. Both of those countries I note, as the Prime Minister did today, have already extended their commitments.

Government Orders

The Netherlands, I am also quick to note, is very much in the region and has committed to this mission because of the Canadian commitment. We were part of the discussion that took place in the Dutch parliament. Most importantly, we made a commitment to the Afghan people themselves to stay the course. It would be gravely irresponsible, and the effect itself would imperil the success of the mission, if we were to bail, as has been suggested by some in the House tonight.

To reduce or withdraw our presence before the Afghan government is fully established would be to invite the return of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, negating our accomplishments to date and ultimately threatening not only Afghanistan's long term security but Canada's security itself. That would be nothing short of irresponsible.

We cannot be seen as being part of an effort to destabilize or fall back on our nation's word and reputation. Canada does not shrink or shirk duty in the face of adversity. In times of turmoil, in places where security is at risk, Canada has always been there. We step up, we step in, we carry our load, we keep faith, and we do not break our word.

● (1750)

An extended commitment to Afghanistan involving integrated Canadian stabilization, governance and development efforts is taking hold. It will allow Canada to continue to help the Afghan government and the international community to get the job done.

Furthermore, the enhanced Canadian engagement in all three areas announced by the Prime Minister will ensure that we are well positioned to continue to exercise leadership in Afghanistan and within the NATO mission which will continue.

This is not a traditional peacekeeping mission. Al-Qaeda and the Taliban refuse to recognize the will expressed by the Afghan people through successive and successful elections. Their efforts to destabilize Afghanistan and provoke the departure of international military forces must not be allowed to succeed. Our continued commitment will send a strong message to the insurgents regarding our resolve. I would suggest that any lack of resolve would send the opposite message, also imperiling the life and safety of Canadian troops and our international partners on the ground in that country.

An extension of our troop presence will also help the Afghan security forces in meeting their training and development benchmarks identified in the Afghanistan compact. This 24 month time period also coincides with the commitments of our NATO allies and it will bring us in line and give us time to help build the secure environment necessary for Afghans to make progress in building critical institutions and infrastructure.

Our presence in Kandahar, in particular, will help the Afghan government bring the benefits of reconstruction to the southern regions of the country in line with NATO's plans to extend its area of operations in support of the Government of Afghanistan in that part of the country. This is a critical time, I emphasize again, and this is the area of the country most in need.

I met with the governor of Kandahar who similarly expressed a desire to have Canadians there to work with Afghan army officials and NATO allies to finish what we started. Even as the security

situation improves, non-military elements will be required, including ongoing assistance and a permanent Canadian embassy, a presence in Kabul. For this reason, as important elements of Canada's overall efforts in Afghanistan, we have planned for additional results based development assistance and enhanced diplomatic representation.

As I mentioned, the Leader of the Opposition has expressed specific concerns which I wish to answer.

Canada will increase its international development assistance. An increase of \$310 million in development assistance, raising our total contribution to nearly \$1 billion over 10 years to the year 2011, will rank Canada among the leading international donors to Afghanistan's reconstruction. The Leader of the Opposition can take pride in knowing that it was his government that began this effort and we encourage him to support this government's effort to continue that capacity building.

Second, there was a question from the member opposite about Canada's commitment. Near the end of each calendar year, 2006, 2007 and 2008, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and National Defence will evaluate results with our allies according to the criteria set out at the London conference and we will share their evaluations with Parliament. That is a solid commitment to keep Parliament informed about progress and benchmarks.

With respect to other commitments in other places, and I know the Minister of National Defence will speak to this in his remarks as well, clearly Canada's commitment to Afghanistan will have some impact on our ability to make further contributions.

However, those requests will be considered carefully in light of the mission itself, which is the responsible thing to do, and demands on Canadian Forces will be given full consideration if and when that ask comes. However one is not contingent upon the other. Our commitment currently in places, such as Haiti and the obvious need for further involvement in Sudan, is not diminished by Canada's commitment to Afghanistan. One does not hinge upon the other.

As well, Canada needs to establish a longer term commitment for the simple reason that the Afghan people need and deserve that at this time.

● (1755)

[Translation]

By purchasing land and building permanent embassy facilities, Canada will be able to continue playing a leading role on the national scene in Kabul, alongside the Afghan government.

The Afghan government needs our help to provide basic services and protect its citizens. We have told them that we will do our part and more, as we have so often done in the past in times of international crisis and need.

Government Orders

[English]

Canada has and always will stand for something. Canada stands for democracy, for human rights, for generosity and for courage, values that the Afghan people so desperately need and want to embrace. I am quick to add that none of the development or the democracy building could happen in that country today without the presence of defence, security and boots on the ground. That is the important connection that cannot be missed.

For some members to suggest that we can surpass the security and defence aspects of this is naive beyond belief. Canadians do not believe in hopscotch democracy. These things cannot happen without security. It is not responsible to somehow suggest that we can pull our troops out and then believe that democracy and development will flourish in Afghanistan.

We have chosen to make a difference, to develop a democratically elected government, to establish accountable governance institutions across the country and to help protect Afghans while they seek to rebuild their lives by eliminating the threat posed by the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and that is happening. Let us just dwell on that for a moment. What must it be like to live in fear, fear that one's school or home may be burned down with no connection whatsoever to one's life? It just happens because one is there. That has been eliminated to a large degree by the presence of troops in that country.

We need to help the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank and our other international partners in their efforts to support Afghanistan's economic recovery, to help train their security forces so they themselves can have an international army, to help strengthen the rule of law, to help farmers find alternatives to poppy crops, to help women advance their lives and the quality of their lives and to help children learn. It is countries like Canada that are making a difference.

The motion we are considering tonight will also make a difference. It will help ensure that Canada continues to be in a position to finish the job we started. An extended and enhanced Canadian commitment to Afghanistan will demonstrate clearly, unequivocally and tangibly to ordinary Afghans that they are right to hold out hope that tomorrow can be better than today.

Securing Afghans' future is in Canada's interests. It is the right thing to do. I have never felt stronger upon my return from Afghanistan that we were there for the right reasons.

In this context, this House should send a clear message of support to the Government of Afghanistan, our international partners and the Canadian men and women of the Canadian Forces who wear their flag, that this mission will be a success, that we are with them all the way.

• (1800)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to express my personal sorrow and the sorrow of all members of the House at the death of our brave soldier today. I also want to express my unequivocal support for the troops in Afghanistan, for the mission and for the renewal of the mission. However I do so in explicit disagreement with the New Democratic Party.

I support the mission precisely because it is the moment where we have to test the shift from one paradigm, the peacekeeping paradigm, to a peace enforcement paradigm that combines military, reconstruction and humanitarian effort together. I have been to Afghanistan and I believe this new paradigm can work.

I have three questions for the minister. First, I support the mission but I want to know whether it is the mission that the Liberal government signed on to or whether it is a new mission. Therefore the questions are: Does the renewal of the mission imply more troops? Does it imply a change in the strategic direction of the mission? Does it imply a change in the balance between the military component, the reconstruction component and the humanitarian component?

My support for the renewal of the mission is dependent upon believing that this proposal is continuous with, and not a departure from, the existing mission of the former government.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I will begin by echoing the sentiments expressed by my colleague opposite for the loss of one of our brave women in the armed forces today. I also want to commend the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore for his unequivocal and unrelenting support for this mission, which he has expressed on numerous occasions both inside and outside the House.

With respect to his question, we are seeing tangible progress and any changes in the mission will be calibrated on the ability in which the security allows for capacity building, allows for the extension of the development into areas which are currently not available to NGOs, to people from CIDA, to the effort that is there to provide direct assistance in tangible ways to the people of Afghanistan.

Will the mission change? This is very difficult to gauge as far as military involvement. The Minister of National Defence is well situated to talk about the successes that have been made. There is no immediate plan whatsoever to commit more troops, nor has there been any asked.

Will there be a change in command? Yes. This will happen as expected and as part of the rotation that will take place through the NATO commitment. As the mission moves from Operation Enduring Freedom to the ISAP mission there will be changes. Does that mean that Canada will play a different or continuing role? Certainly, but again it will be calibrated on our ability to secure certain regions within the country.

However, what is most important is that this democracy building, this effort to provide direct assistance in the area of development is brought about because of the security and the continued presence of our military, along with our international allies.

I again commend and congratulate the member opposite for his commitment to this mission tonight.

• (1805)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore asked if the mission would change. The mission has changed. That is what we are debating tonight.

Government Orders

We are discussing a change in the role that Canada has played in Afghanistan, which has been a fantastic role in terms of our ability to rebuild that country. We are now involved in a counter-insurgency operation under Operation Enduring Freedom. Canadians want to know why we are under this operation.

I would like to bring to the attention of the member what happen under Operation Enduring Freedom. At midnight on May 22, 2002, two U.S. attack helicopters were brought into the village of Hajibirgit and Sten grenades were used against families. U.S. forces grabbed village men, took them to Kandahar, stripped them naked, shaved their beards and interrogated them in front of female soldiers. The village is now a dead village because the villagers have fled and have not been back. That is what happened under U.S. command.

What is the wisdom of taking the incredible work that the Canadian army is doing and putting it into that kind of action, which is counter-insurgency, and attacking villages as opposed to building villages?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, what is completely sad is that the member would somehow diminish the real important work that is being done. Millions of Afghan children are now in school and work is being done to build villages with clean water, with hospitals and with schools. I do not know how the member can debase that effort and equate it with some of the rigorous activity that is going on inside that country, the activities that he described.

I do not expect members of the NDP to understand this. I fully expect that the Neville Chamberlains of the 21st century in the NDP do not want to be part of an effort that is aimed at elevating the lives of the people of Afghanistan. It is unfortunate that they would take this off track and try to debase the real activity, the important quality of life changes that are taking place because of our forces being in Afghanistan. That is what is so misleading about the position of the NDP.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of this House for 12 years. When I take part in such a debate, I see myself in 10 or 12 years, when I will no longer be a member in this Parliament, and people will be asking me whether I voted in favour of extending the deployment or against it. I want to be able to answer them yes or no, based on sufficient and satisfactory information.

A while ago, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore gave his support and asked questions later. Unlike him, before saying I am ready to ask for an extension of the mission, I want to be certain of having got all the information.

That is why I would like to ask the minister whether, in fact, the right procedure to follow would not have been to agree to the recommendation of the Standing Committee on National Defence and conduct an in-depth study of the question. We have the time to do so. For the minister, for the government, what is the big rush today? This urgency has led us to a debate when we do not have all the necessary information. We are being asked to get caught up in the spiral and then, in five or ten years, we will have to deal with the decisions we made.

I do not have anything against supporting it. I intervened in the take-note debate on April 10, 2006. Today I am asking the minister why the government has refused to follow the procedure envisioned? There would still be time to get adequate information and then vote. It is in this regard that the government is irresponsible. Can the minister admit that he should change his position and take the time for adequate consultation—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to interrupt the member. The Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the opposition member for this question. I hope that, after this debate, after the information received from all the members taking part in this debate, he will be able to answer yes, I supported this motion. I hope so, but I think his mind is already made up.

[*English*]

Why now, is a very a simple response. Because the Afghan people need to know the Canadians will be there. Our NATO allies need to know we will be there. The president of Afghanistan has requested that Canada commit to a longer mission.

We have to project stability, resolve and commitment. Those are qualities with which Canadians are well familiar. That is the type of perseverance and persistence that Canadians have come to expect. That is what we are getting from our troops in Afghanistan today.

Most important, the Canadian men and women of the armed forces need to know that their government and their people back home, who are safe and sound while they are out on patrol in real risk of losing their lives, taking bullets for Canadians and Afghans alike, support them. I encourage the hon. member to do the same.

• (1810)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the minister for his record on this file, for going to Afghanistan, for standing with our men and women there as well as with the Afghanistan people.

President Karzai has asked Canada to extend its mission in Afghanistan. He did not give an invitation to every other country. He asked Canada. If we were to step back, who would step up? Would Netherlands step up and replace the leadership role that Canada has? Would Great Britain respond and fulfill the role that Canada has had? Would we wait for New Zealand to come forward? Which country would step forward? Canada is being applauded around the world.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I thank the members of our party and members of the House of Commons who have also served in the Canadian armed forces, including our distinguished Minister of National Defence.

The question is a very good one. Why would anyone expect that Canada would now blink in the face of this challenge? Why would we expect someone else to fill the role that we are currently filling? Other countries have troops there. Other countries also have troops in other countries like Iraq. Why should Canada, at this critical moment on this mission, fade or back away? That is not the Canadian way.

There will be a day when Canadians will come home with their heads held high. When our men and women return, they will know that the job was finished, that their work was done and that our country embraced that effort.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Oakville.

First of all, permit me to offer my condolences to the family and relatives of officer Nichola Goddard.

Unfortunately, the first thing that has to be said here is that there has been a little too much verbal bombast. Regardless of how we vote, it is important to send our troops in Afghanistan the clear message that we support them and their mission. Each time there is an attempt to play politics with this issue, it becomes clear how the Conservative Party, this government, has tried from the outset to corner us in a political trap. The Prime Minister's message this evening has been loud and clear. He said that even if the motion is defeated there will be a renewal for one year, after which we would make it an issue in the next election. That is the situation today: regardless of whether or not we hold a debate and a vote, clearly this government already holds the hand it is going to play. It makes you wonder if he hasn't prepared a little communication session, given the visit of the Australian prime minister here tomorrow, to announce that we ourselves have done the same thing. Unfortunately, that is not how things should work in politics.

I also find it regrettable that the Minister of Foreign Affairs called one of our colleagues a 21st century Chamberlain. We should be spared such insults. That is extremely regrettable. The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore asked him some extremely pertinent questions, but unfortunately we got no answers.

Given that lack of response, on behalf of the citizens of the riding of Bourassa whom I represent and as a Canadian and a Quebecker, I am not able to write this government a blank cheque. We know for a fact that countries such as the Netherlands have held discussions for months and set a date long in advance: that is how they have been able to reach a decision on the renewal of this mission.

We have also presented a golden opportunity. The Liberal Party, the official opposition, has supported the motion of the Bloc Québécois in the Standing Committee on National Defence. This is not complicated. Anyone who knows anything at all about the military issue knows for a fact that we have at least until next fall to make a final decision. It would not cost more. We do not want to play politics—petty politics—to the detriment of the troops we support, the men and women working on humanitarian grounds, the great Canadians who are supporting and guiding the Afghan people. We must not play politics at their expense. That would be extremely regrettable. We must support them.

It was our government, at the time, that proposed this mission. First of all, members will recall that we were working in collaboration with NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, in Kabul. Why are we being pressed so hard today to give this response? Why, after 36 hours' notice, hold a six-hour debate, at the end of which we will unfortunately be obliged to make this sort of decision? In any case, the Prime Minister has stated very clearly

Government Orders

today that if the motion is defeated, there will still be a renewal for one year, after which we would go to the polls.

As minister of the Crown and special advisor on Haiti for the Prime Minister at the time, the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, I was proud to see the extent to which it is important to combine security and humanitarian assistance. The NDP is way off course in trying to say that we should focus strictly on humanitarian assistance without regard for security. Security is essential. If we want to make sure that things will work out well, we must have an exit strategy too. Some very specific criteria must be taken into account when we deploy a mission to a country out of our desire to help people who have suffered too long. We must avoid at all cost getting bogged down in this kind of conflict. That is not a lack of courage. In doing so, we are just demonstrating a sense of responsibility. We know that if we want to be effective over there, we must work as well with our other allies.

The Minister of National Defence says that if we send troops to Afghanistan, we will not have any others to deploy elsewhere. But we know very well that the United Nations has asked for the Darfur process to be started up right away.

● (1815)

I am also very pleased that Haiti has a new president, but his situation is still very fragile. Canada plays a key role and has important responsibilities in the Americas. We have a role to play here too. If we go there, we cannot go elsewhere and are putting all our eggs in one basket. It is only natural for us as members of Parliament, the elected representatives of the people in this cradle of democracy, not to flout the legislative process. We too want to ask some questions.

It does not cost us anything to take our time when we know very well that the deadline is February 2007 and that in any case, even if we say no, the mission will continue until February 2008.

I find this very disturbing. I can quote figures. We are going to spend another \$310 million on humanitarian assistance, but in accordance with what requirements, what plan of attack? We know very well that the more things heat up, the more troops will be needed. This means that it will cost more in resources and human lives. It is important as well to say so. Is it irresponsible to ask this kind of question? This is not only a technical matter but a strategic one as well.

Churchill said that battles are won with tactics. We want to win the war, and in order to win it, we need a strategy. This means that we must be inclusive.

All of us here are Canadians and proud of it. We are proud of our troops and proud of this mission. But the government should not ask us today for a blank cheque, not on such short notice and after a six-hour debate. That is totally unacceptable. We were elected to carry out our responsibilities and fully play our part.

Government Orders

• (1820)

[English]

I do not think it is too much to ask for a little more time. I know one thing for sure, and that is the heat is on. It is going to take more. I totally support the mission and our troops. I pay tribute to the men and women who highly represent our great nation. It is important to mention that. However, I also believe that when we make a decision to prolong the mission for two more years, some criteria have to be fulfilled.

The only thing the government is asking us for is a blank cheque. The Prime Minister is playing politics. This was shown by his attitude in the House today. If the House says no to this motion, he has said it does not matter. He does not care what we think. The government would automatically renew for one year and then the Prime Minister would go to the polls. It is totally shameful to make that kind of statement.

[Translation]

I am proud to be the nephew of Charles Arbour, whom I salute here today. He was a military police sergeant. He participated in the liberation of Holland and Belgium. He contributed to the democracy and freedom that we now enjoy. However, he also knows from experience that, when such important action is needed, proper preparations must be made. Naturally, certain parameters and guidelines must be established.

We are told that we do not necessarily have the equipment required. How will we obtain what is needed? I am very proud that we are in Afghanistan, but we are told that the past four years have already cost us \$4.1 billion. I am willing to make this investment and to see Canada continuing to work and provide support in this area. However, it seems only logical to also ask whether we have the tools we need to succeed.

[English]

This is a universal issue. It is an international issue. We are there to accompany them. We are there to support the Afghan people. For God's sake, I just hope that once and for all we stop playing politics on the backs of our troops and do our job. Let us get together. Let us take more time. We will be there to help them.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's comments.

First I would like to express on my own behalf and that of my colleagues our deep condolences for the soldier who was lost today in the line of duty in Afghanistan as well as the other soldiers we have lost in theatre.

I am also very proud to have members of the Saskatchewan Dragoons from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, serving in Afghanistan in theatre. Many members have served and returned.

I want to say for the member opposite that I hope no one in the House would be accused of playing politics with such a serious issue. I hope that all of us would stand solidly behind our troops.

I have three brief questions for the member opposite. First, we have been in Afghanistan for five years. Have the member and his party not had enough time to decide basically where they stand on

the mission? Yes, the situation will evolve on the ground and there will be certain changes, but have the member and his party not had enough time to decide basically where they stand?

Second, if the member has questions that remain, could he ask them succinctly tonight and seek answers, as some members have done?

Third, does the member recognize that it is a bit odd to criticize the process leading to the vote tonight when the initial two year deployment was made by the then Liberal government with no vote at the time?

There are three easy questions.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple.

Obviously, our government at that time took responsibility, as would any government that wants to play a leading role and to help those who are suffering.

That is one thing. But to say here today that we are going to be asked for an immediate two-year extension, that is another thing. We are not questioning the mission. No one is questioning the mission or our troops. The issue before us today is whether to immediately ask for another two years.

• (1825)

[English]

That is the issue. The issue today is not about the mission. The issue is not about whether we are supporting the troops or not. The issue is, do we have that capacity right now to address the issue of an extension of two years? The answer is no. The Netherlands took months and has in advance the date to decide.

An hon. member: Ten months.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We are talking about 10 months, so what is the hurry? Probably the Minister of National Defence will address this, but we can wait until this fall to have this kind of decision. What is the hurry? Now we have six hours of debate, plus all those slogans, and that is an issue by itself.

I believe we should have more time to decide. What is the hurry?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday the Bloc Québécois tabled a motion to the National Defence Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, a motion the NDP and hon. members from the Liberal Party concurred in. This motion called for the subcommittee to study the various aspects of the mission of Canadian troops in Afghanistan, such as the duration of the mission, the state of the troops and, finally, a great deal of information that we do not have. We deplore this lack of information.

We now have before us a motion that was tabled by the Prime Minister asking the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan to be extended for another two years.

Government Orders

My question is for the hon. member for Bourassa: how does he explain that the Prime Minister and the Conservative government are in such a rush to ask the House to vote on extending this mission for another two years?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for his question.

I had a bad feeling when I heard the way the Prime Minister was speaking today. I felt like I was listening to a type of state of the union address.

[*English*]

I am a movie addict and I had a feeling that I was looking at the Austin Powers movie and that was the mini-me who was talking. I had the feeling that it was a Republican speech.

[*Translation*]

It felt like a Republican speech.

It think it is a shame. In speaking about September 11, he tried to question the entire mission. I was the immigration minister after that period. We implemented security measures and we faced up to our responsibilities. To come here today in such a rush in the House of Commons to consider rubber stamping this issue is unacceptable to me.

Countries like the Netherlands have assumed their responsibilities. They are our allies and work together with us and NATO. They have discussed this for 10 months. I do not want to take 10 months to discuss this, but in my opinion the Conservative Party is trying too much to play politics with this. They could have very easily been inclusive and agreed to take an extra month—not 25 months. We will deal with the motion, supported by the three opposition parties. We will have a debate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. The member for Oakville.

[*English*]

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to participate in this debate. In all of us who are parliamentarians, this debate stimulates a self-examination of our responsibilities. Simply put, I believe we are responsible for two basic things: the establishment and maintenance of conditions that facilitate the well-being of our citizens at home and abroad, and second, the prudent use of the financial resources of Canada's treasury.

As a member of the loyal opposition, I have a third responsibility. According to the rules of Parliament, I am responsible to hold the government to account through questioning and, where appropriate, even criticism.

Tonight the minority Conservative government is asking us to support an extension of two years to our mission in Afghanistan, two years beyond February 2007. The end date of the request is February 2009. That is 33 months from now.

How does this request for an extension impact my three basic responsibilities? First, on the well-being of our citizens abroad, I must consider our members of the armed forces, Canadians working in Afghanistan in diplomacy, community development and all forms of human service to the Afghan people.

I must also consider Canadians at home, including the family members of our soldiers and aid workers and those generous Canadians who work to raise money for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. For example, my local chapter of Canadians in Support of Afghan Women has, since 1998, sent \$280,000 directly to schools in Afghanistan.

I must be clear at this point that I supported the mission which began only three months ago. I support the three components of that mission, that is, defence, development and diplomacy, but I want to see how these three components work together to effectively better the lives of all Afghans.

As I said in the take note debate just about a month ago, we must monitor our activities in Afghanistan, watch for outcomes, both intended and unintended, evaluate the facts that emerge, and make decisions as the situation evolves. So I ask myself, do the first three months of this new type of operation give us enough information to decide our course of action for 33 more months?

Certainly we all agree on the goals. They are laudable, but will our activities there achieve these goals? In my opinion, it is too soon to tell. That is why yesterday in the House I introduced an amendment to the government's motion.

My amendment referred the motion to a joint committee of defence and foreign affairs. It asked such a committee to hold public consultations with Canadians, both experts and regular folks, and then to report to Parliament by October 15. At that time, the government would have had nine months of observations on the mission and reports that would give us sufficient information on which to base a judgment and a plan for the future.

As the previous speaker mentioned, the Dutch debate on their role in Afghanistan took 10 months. They concluded a commitment of two years after 10 months of debate. We are being asked to stretch our commitment, and we are committed to it, to three years, after six hours of debate. There is something inappropriate about this request from the government.

I am totally aware that this mission itself represents life and death for some of our soldiers. It represents the viability of certain Canadian families who may lose a husband, a wife, or a son or a daughter. It represents hope for the future of the Afghan people. It is very important, and we are the people who are responsible.

That is why my main question is, what is the big rush? Is Parliament in charge of our foreign and defence policy or is NATO or is Operation Enduring Freedom? I keep hearing we are being asked to do this and asked to do that, but I think Canadians are prudent folks and they would like to take their time and be sure that a course of action is viable and affordable and has a chance of being successful.

• (1830)

Talking about affordable, on the prudent use of financial resources, we know that we have already spent over \$4 billion in Afghanistan since we first went there on our various missions. During the same period we spent only \$214 million on UN operations. We know we have 2,300 troops in Afghanistan and only 59 abroad in UN operations.

Government Orders

I ask myself, is this the balance that Canadians want? We do not know. How much will 33 more months cost? For example, if the terms change and if 2,300 troops become 5,300 troops after the big recruitment drive by the government, that would at least double the cost. We do not know what the government's plans are. We do know that the plans in the budget suggest another 23,000 members of the armed forces and we know there are great big dollars in the budget to accommodate that, but we do not know the connection between all those new service people and the Afghan mission.

Certainly I am not against spending money in Afghanistan. They have needs there and Canadians are generous, but I question whether Canadians are on side for this large expenditure. After all, as the government keeps reminding us, it is their money.

What about my responsibility as a member of the loyal opposition? In the last election, Canadians decided to give the Conservatives a chance to govern, but as a slim minority. Canadians decided to elect a strong opposition to keep the new group in check. If I vote yes to this motion, I give the government my approval for whatever manner it chooses in conducting this mission, because if I ask a question, the government will come back at me and say, "You voted yes".

I believe Canadians are always right. Their marching orders to me are, hold the new government to account. Therefore, I cannot give up my right to question and monitor the government's management of an important military mission abroad.

The Prime Minister seems happy about his first 100 days and Canadians are respectful of their Prime Minister and his accomplishments, but they are also aware that he has little more than 100 days of experience as a Prime Minister and no previous cabinet experience.

I admit he carries a very heavy load and in my opinion he can benefit from the longer experience in government, in life and in matters of world geopolitics that can be found in some members on this side. That is why I want to keep the lines of communication open, the ability for this side to question that side all through the next several months.

For all these reasons, the fact that it is too rushed, the fact that Canadians do not like quick decisions, the fact that I am not comfortable that I know the whole story, that it has not been shared with me, I will definitely be voting no at this time.

• (1835)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member reiterated a number of questions, one of which was why "the rush". I remind the member that the government of which she was a part made the initial placement of Canadian troops, development workers and diplomats four years ago. This is not a rush for us to consider a prolongation of the mission which I think was being considered by the previous government.

What is different in this instance is that this government, further to an electoral commitment, is consulting the House of Commons. This did not happen previously. I find it peculiar that members who are now being consulted are objecting to the process of consultation, objecting to a vote.

This is a sincere question. Would the member prefer that we revert to the status quo ante where the executive, the cabinet, took military decisions exclusively without a vote in the House? Would that be preferable to the member?

When she asked why now, it is very clear that just last week the president of Afghanistan made some very pointed questions about Canada's ongoing commitment. He needs to plan, if we are not going to be there, to find other donor countries, other actors to take our place. Our government will be participating in a NATO meeting next week, a force commitment meeting, where we will have to pony up, where we will have to give an indication of whether we are in or out. This government wanted in good faith to consult the House of Commons before doing so.

Would the hon. member care to comment on whether we should just go to that force commitment meeting of NATO and say that we are sorry, but we want to spend several months in a parliamentary debate toward having a vote, which we have never had before?

• (1840)

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, on the question of consultations with the House of Commons, I have to say that I think this is a big step forward for democracy and I appreciate the opportunity very much.

I do believe it is a rush when we had about 36 hours' notice of a motion that will bind us for 33 more months, particularly when lives are at stake and our experience with the mission is only three months long. For the monitoring, evaluation and planning that comes from the information that flows from Afghanistan to Canada, I do not think three months is long enough, as I pointed out in my speech.

Of course, President Karzai asked for us. Everybody knows our troops are among the best in the world and that they are also sensitive to local people and try to engage them in the building of the country and the making of peace. Naturally he asked for us. I know the Afghan women have said there is no one they would rather have there than the Canadians.

As the member pointed out, this is a NATO mission. I have found in life that if one volunteers to stay somewhere forever and ever, no one will step forward to have a turn. I think it is better to be cautious and wait until NATO has a replacement for us at some point than to jump when a call comes in saying a meeting is being held and the Canadian Parliament has to leap and obey. I am sorry, but foreign policy and defence policy are made here. They are not made at NATO.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her speech. I would first like to say that, as a former officer with the Canadian navy, I am familiar with our armed forces and that I strongly support them.

I have two questions for the hon. member.

[*English*]

First, we have heard there is progress in the Kandahar area. Does the member think there is progress really happening in Kandahar when we see a deterioration of the situation?

Government Orders

Second, does the hon. member believe that we should learn from history? The British Empire went into Afghanistan. The mighty Russian military machine went into Afghanistan and did not succeed. Does she honestly believe that we can succeed in our mission in two years and, if not, how long do we have to stay in Afghanistan before we finally realize that we are going to be another one of the European or other nations that will never succeed?

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, the member's question illustrates my point very well. Nobody, except privy councillors who have been briefed, knows if there has been real progress in Kandahar. Therefore, the idea of finding that out before we commit to another 33 months seems to me to be absolutely important.

He asked if we could learn from history and it is true that invaders of Afghanistan have had very poor results. The Afghans can be great fighters and they have fought off almost everybody who ever went there. The difference is that we have been asked to go there by the new Afghan government. Whether or not one agrees with that government or the president, officially they have asked us. It is a slightly different thing.

The other thing is we are not just an invading army. We are doing diplomacy and development work. We have all kinds of non-military people over there trying to accomplish that.

I do not know if there is progress in Kandahar. We know there is progress in Kabul, that people in Kabul feel a lot safer today than they did before.

About learning from history, some people keep saying that great military action is such a strong part of Canadian tradition. They thump their chests and quote their great-grandfathers. I think that is when we have to say that was then, this is now and ask, have we not learned anything since? These aggressive military actions—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I apologize to the member, but we have to move on to the next speaker.

Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I begin, I want to offer condolences to the family of Captain Nichola Goddard. Our thoughts are with them tonight.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

Today, Canada faces a weighty decision: whether to continue our diplomatic, military, police and development efforts in Afghanistan for another two years, or to let our contributions expire in February 2007.

Last month, I stood in this House to explain why the Canadian Forces are involved in Afghanistan. While six weeks have passed, the rationale for this mission has obviously not changed. In fact, the rationale has not changed since the previous government committed the Canadian Forces to this mission four years ago.

I stand here today to advise Canadians that our job in Afghanistan—a job that we have executed successfully so far—is not finished. The right decision is obvious.

[*English*]

The bottom line is that the mission in Afghanistan supports one of the enduring goals of Canada's foreign and defence policy: to protect Canada's national interest. We must commit to seeing our mission through. Our national interest is straightforward: to ensure the security and prosperity of the Canadian people. This government has summed it up in two words: Canada first.

The Canada first defence strategy seeks to protect Canadians from threats that confront us at home, along our coastlines and from any place abroad. Right now this means being in Afghanistan, once a failed state that harboured terrorists, terrorists who attacked our closest friend and ally, terrorists who killed Canadians and who still threaten Canada, terrorists who now seek to undermine the democratically elected government of Afghanistan.

In 2002 Canada decided to help ensure that Afghanistan does not again harbour such extremists. We are not in Afghanistan alone but with a dedicated group of more than 30 countries. The mission is a priority for our allies in NATO, the G-8 and the United Nations. As a responsible ally and member of the international community, Canada must continue to participate in this mission.

[*Translation*]

We are also in Afghanistan at the request of the Afghans themselves. We responded to that request because Canada has a longstanding tradition of helping those in need.

Afghanistan was a failed state and remains one of the poorest countries in the world. By helping provide security and stability in Afghanistan, the Canadian Forces are creating a safe environment where reconstruction can take place. Let me assure you, Afghans have no doubt as to why we are in Afghanistan or to the positive impact that we are having there.

[*English*]

Because our national interest is at stake, because our allies need our help, and because Afghans themselves requested our presence, over 7,000 Canadian troops have been deployed to Afghanistan since 2002. Altogether some 16,000 Canadian troops have been involved in the international campaign against terrorism since September 11, 2001.

Today we have over 2,000 troops in Afghanistan. The 1st Battalion of the Princess Patricia's is helping the Afghan national security forces improve security in Kandahar province. We have a provincial reconstruction team stationed in Kandahar City comprised not only of Canadian Forces members but also of specialists from CIDA, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the RCMP. Together they form a multi-dimensional and integrated team that is working to stabilize Kandahar province and facilitate and encourage development efforts there.

Government Orders

We have a strategic advisory team in Kabul giving advice to President Karzai's government. We have Canadian Forces personnel working at the Kabul military training centre, the coalition hospital at Kandahar airport and in ISAF headquarters. We are leading the multinational brigade for regional command south in its transition to NATO control scheduled for this summer. Our troops in Afghanistan are among the most capable in the world.

[Translation]

They have acquitted themselves well under fire. They have captured Taliban insurgents. They have befriended local leaders. They have helped provide for the pressing humanitarian needs of the local population. They have supported efforts to diversify the Afghan economy and to deal with the global threat posed by narcotics originating in that country.

• (1850)

[English]

In short, we have the right personnel with the right skills, training and equipment to meet the requirements of the mission in Afghanistan and to deal with the risks involved.

Be assured that we will continue to make sure that our troops have the right equipment to be successful. The Department of National Defence is currently conducting a study to determine how well the needs of our soldiers are being met for the mission in Afghanistan and what we can do to support them better.

Moreover, the Department of National Defence has purchased \$234 million of new equipment specifically in support of this mission, including the heavily armoured Nyala patrol vehicles our forces recently received, one of which, as we witnessed last Monday, already saved the lives of two Canadian soldiers when it was struck by a roadside bomb.

Our troops are also equipped with robust rules of engagement that allow them to execute operations effectively and they are rooted in a strong command and control structure that is framed around a new generation of leaders formed in the crucible of real and relevant operations.

Moreover, their mission stands on a firm legal basis. After September 11, 2001, Canada acted in accordance with article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, which maintains our individual and collective rights of self-defence. The United Nations Security Council recognized this right in resolution 1368, passed on September 12, 2001. Our current mission in Afghanistan is based on our legal right to defend ourselves.

In addition, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, which is scheduled to expand this summer, is mandated by the United Nations, under Security Council resolution 1623. Moreover, the Government of Canada has the consent of the government of Afghanistan.

[Translation]

We all know that the Canadian commitment has not and will not come without cost. A cost measured not only in dollars and cents, but also in human lives. We have mourned the loss of 17 Canadians since the mission began. And others have suffered serious injury. But Canada must persevere in this mission.

[English]

The efforts of the Canadian Forces have brought about real progress in Afghanistan. Upon its expansion this summer, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force will be present in three-quarters of the country, with plans to expand soon thereafter.

We are moving into areas where al-Qaeda and the Taliban were previously uncontested. We are restricting their movement, undermining their local support and engaging them face to face. Our Canadian trainers are working at the Kabul Military Training Centre, graduating up to 800 Afghan recruits every two weeks.

Just last week, Canadian soldiers captured 10 suspected Taliban fighters or sympathizers who were hiding out near the Gombad forward operating base. This was the biggest capture of suspected insurgents by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan to date.

The detainees were then rightfully turned over to the Afghan authorities, in accordance with our arrangement regarding detainees, an arrangement that supports the principle that Afghan authorities have the responsibility for handling detainees captured in their sovereign territory, an arrangement that helps strengthen local capacity and good governance.

Our strategic advisory team, a highly influential group of just 15 people, is currently working with Afghan leaders in Kabul to develop the fledgling institutions of the Afghan state. This team was specifically requested by President Karzai. Its military and civilian members are working with his senior economic adviser on the Afghan national development strategy. They are helping the Civil Service Commission build a legitimate and accountable public service and they are on hand to assist President Karzai's chief of staff.

Our Canadian Forces medical outreach team, which is part of our provincial reconstruction team, as well as members of our battle group, regularly visit villages and offer medical services to the suffering population.

These are the real efforts and achievements of the Canadian Forces, in partnership with officials from foreign affairs, CIDA and the RCMP.

[Translation]

We have concrete benchmarks to evaluate the progress and success of this mission. The Afghanistan Compact, along with Canada's own strategy and plans for the mission in Afghanistan, lays out the medium-term benchmarks and the final objectives to which we are aiming.

The compact, signed in London earlier this year, outlines how the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations, the international community, and Canada are going to work over the next five years to ensure that the Afghanistan mission achieves its desired effects. While we still have significant work left to do, we have a clear roadmap guiding us forward.

•(1855)

[*English*]

Ultimate success in Afghanistan will be achieved when the country and its government are stabilized, when the terrorists and their local support networks are defeated, when we are assured that terrorist groups will be denied sanctuary within Afghanistan, when the Afghan national security forces are well established and under the firm and legitimate control of the government of Afghanistan and when these forces can protect their own people and their own country.

Working toward these objectives requires long term commitment and sustained effort by the international community. It depends upon the future contributions of Canada.

That is why, in parallel with expanded diplomatic and development efforts, the government strongly believes that the mandate of the Canadian Forces contingents, including the army task force, its enabling forces and the provincial reconstruction team, should be extended for another 24 months from February 2007 to February 2009. This is the minimum contribution necessary to achieve mission success and to exercise leadership among our allies.

Canada should also plan to reassume the leadership of the multinational brigade in Kandahar in November 2007 for another six months and will be open to other leadership opportunities as they arise.

[*Translation*]

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

A two-year commitment will help ensure a smooth political transition in 2009 when the current mandate of President Karzai ends.

A two-year commitment is what our allies expect and need from us. The planned contributions of the U.K. and the Netherlands, for example—who have committed troops for the next three and two years respectively—are predicated upon Canadian participation in this mission. If we let our mandate expire in February, we would risk our allies' support for the mission and the success of the mission itself.

[*English*]

The two year commitment is also consistent with the timeline expected in the Afghanistan compact. A two year commitment will employ significant military resources, but the Canadian Forces will retain some flexibility to respond to other priorities or to other unforeseen crises. This was a question that was raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

We can maintain the commitment into Afghanistan ad infinitum at its current level. What we can also do is have a naval task force available for deployment in the world to meet a crisis. We can also contribute modest land force contributions to meet other anticipated crises. From what we know is evolving in Darfur and Haiti, which are two examples, we believe we can meet whatever requirement is being set for us by the United Nations or other forces.

Government Orders

In the long term, the government is committed to expanding the Canadian Forces in support of a greater leadership role for Canada in world affairs.

In the short term, however, these expansion efforts will limit our ability to undertake another major operation. We will continue to play supporting roles in other operations or crises.

[*Translation*]

The Canadian Forces are in Afghanistan standing up for Canada's national interest.

They are partnering with our allies. They are helping the people of Afghanistan. But their mission is not yet complete. Together with our allies, we have devised a clear plan that outlines the way forward, to achieve the aims that we have set out.

As a responsible member of the international community, as one of the most prosperous nations on earth, and with our national interest at stake, Canada must extend and expand our commitment to this multinational mission.

[*English*]

As was said by Edmund Burke, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing”. Afghanistan asked for our help and that of the international community in eliminating the threat posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban. These terrorist networks are failing in Afghanistan because Canadians recognize the implications of complacency.

Through the good work of Canadians, Afghan institutions are functioning again. Liberty is returning after a long and cold absence. Women have a stake and a voice in the country. Learning is blossoming in countless schools.

Simply put, the Taliban and al-Qaeda are losing the battle because brave Canadians have stood up in the front lines.

Let us solidify the achievements we have gained so far. Let us move this mission forward, for the sake of the Afghan people, for the sake of our allies and for the sake of each and every Canadian. As the Canadian Forces put Canada's national interest first, they deserve nothing less than our continued support.

Therefore, I call upon all members of Parliament to support the motion that extends Canada's commitment in Afghanistan to February 2009.

•(1900)

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think maybe the minister got a little carried away in his French.

[*Translation*]

He said twelve years instead of two years. The House would find that a bit hard to swallow.

[*English*]

I assume his English on two years was a little more reliable than his French on douze ans.

Government Orders

I believe the minister clearly confirmed what his colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said. Ultimately he is giving the assurance to the House that the potential for a Haiti or a Darfur mission will not be diminished by our Afghan commitments. Those were the words of the foreign minister. I believe those are the words that members of the House want to hear when we debate and come to a decision on this very important mission.

I have two questions.

One goes to his observation about the nature of equipment. I have recently read a book by General Rupert Smith called *The Utility of Force*. In that book he describes very clearly the nature of these new missions and the type of equipment that is necessary because these are always actions behind enemy lines or within an area where it is not like a traditional situation.

Could the minister assure us that, with the use and prevalence of IEDs and these types of weapons in Afghanistan, our forces are properly protected? He mentioned the Nyala. We know the minister will be purchasing trucks shortly. Will these trucks also have the types of protection that would be necessary?

Second, he mentioned the strategic advisory team in Kabul, which has had huge success. Will the minister tell us whether the government intends to replicate this activity in Kandahar as well to enable the governor and the region to provide similar success the civil society in that area?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I will confirm, to the best of our knowledge and within the resources that we know we have, that we anticipate we can meet requests from the United Nations or whoever asks us for Darfur or Haiti. We have done our assessment and talked to the United Nations and other people to get a sense of what they want, and I think we can certainly meet their needs.

With respect to equipment, I saw some photos recently of the explosion that occurred about a week ago in which the Nyala was involved. That vehicle saved the lives of those two soldiers. It is built to deal with mines. It suffered the same extent of explosion as the Mercedes Jeep had a few weeks earlier, when four of our soldiers died. The soldiers inside the Nyala were shaken up and slightly wounded, but their lives were saved. That is proving to be a good piece of equipment.

Yes, when the truck project goes forward, I anticipate that a number of the cabs will have to be armoured. When these trucks are deployed offshore into dangerous areas, the crews can be protected. I am quite confident we will have that kind of equipment.

With respect to the member's question about whether we would duplicate the strategic team in Kabul, I cannot honestly answer that question. I would have to ask one of the ministers because I have not asked that question, but it is a fine idea.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Minister of National Defence about some statements he made on November 15, 2005, when he was national defence critic.

When a government decides to intervene in a failing state there are a number of considerations that must be taken before committing troops. It must be satisfied that the mission supports the goals and objectives of Canada's foreign policy.

I do not have great confidence that the government had satisfactory answers to these considerations before committing our troops to increased involvement in Afghanistan.

This is just part of what he said. There is much more, but I will only quote a few excerpts.

The Bloc's position on the mission is this: before making a decision about such an important matter as extending Canada's presence in Afghanistan by two years, the government must inform parliamentarians and the public.

As defence critic, he asked a number of questions consistent with the motion that we submitted to the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure of the Standing Committee on National Defence. We wanted a more in-depth review of our mission and presence in Afghanistan. As such, how can the minister say that today, everything seems clear to him and he is ready to make a commitment on behalf of himself and his government for two more years without providing more information to parliamentarians and the public?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, my opinion has not changed. The questions I asked when I was in opposition are valid questions and I have the answers to those questions. When I came over to the defence department, I made it my business to find the answers to these various questions.

The one that the member raises is whether our operations in Afghanistan are in accordance with our foreign policy goals and objectives. They are. Our Canada first defence policy and our foreign policy mean that we have to think in terms of Canada. If we can keep threats away from Canada, if we can deal with threats that are far away from us, that is better than dealing with them at home.

The member may recall that we are in Afghanistan today because of the attacks in New York City in 2001. That is why we are there today. About 24 or 25 Canadians were killed in New York. Terrorists came from Afghanistan, a failed state, so we, as part of a coalition, went back into Afghanistan, overthrew the Taliban government, and helped restore democracy in Afghanistan. It is definitely in our interests.

I might say that in opposition I certainly did ask questions, but I did not oppose the commitment to Afghanistan. In fact, if the member were to check, he would find that the Conservative Party supported the Liberal Party on the mission in Afghanistan.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the speech that the minister delivered here tonight. There are things that he said with which we in this party agree concerning the training of the Canadian armed forces. They are skilled. They are well-trained. They are incredibly brave and all Canadians appreciate the work that they have done and the work that they are doing.

Government Orders

However, I was also pleased to hear that he has found the answers to the questions that he asked a few months ago regarding this mission. I hope that he will share the answers to those questions with us tonight in the House of Commons. It would be most appreciated by all of us who are here tonight.

Further to that are some of the questions that we have asked and have not received responses. Why did NATO not take over the mission in southern Afghanistan in February? The previous minister on the Liberal side had indicated to the House in November of last year that NATO would be there in February. It is not under NATO. It is under Operation Enduring Freedom. That is in the minutes of the defence committee.

If NATO does take over, what will the mission be? How will it interrelate with Operation Enduring Freedom?

• (1910)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, right now, I understand that the schedule for NATO to take over our sector is somewhere in late June or July. That is the plan right now, and it is only because of bureaucracy that things get delayed. There is no other reason.

The NDP keep saying that it is different under the American command than under NATO. We are going to do exactly the same thing. Our military is going to perform the same roles. Our aid people are going to do the same thing. Our diplomats and the RCMP are going to do the same thing. There will not be one iota of change except that we will be under NATO command instead of Enduring Freedom. Nothing will change.

We are following the same tactics. We are following NATO tactics. Go check what the French are doing in the north. Go check what the Germans are doing in the north. They are doing the same thing.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the Leader of the Opposition, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence for their excellent and passionate speeches. Everybody in this House is extremely passionate about our mission in Afghanistan. I also agree that there is no question that defeating the jihadists and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan translates to security for us here at home and for the Afghans in Afghanistan.

The Taliban are now increasingly deploying new modus operandi of suicide bombings and al-Qaeda has reinvested in Afghanistan, which would explain the surge in attacks.

For the benefit of all members of this House, I would like to ask the knowledgeable Minister of Defence just a couple of very quick questions and then he can take his time answering them.

What is the strategy for a counter-insurgency operation, so that the insurgents are not just contained but rolled back, so the Afghan security forces have a level playing field to control their own country? Could the minister briefly explain about the CF units that are to be integrated with the ISAF under the command of ARRC? They would then be moving down from stage three to stage four in all probability and there will be some rebadging going on which is a serious situation. That is one of the concerns I have in the timing of this six hour debate. Could the minister please comment on that?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, the member asked a lot in his questions. With respect to dealing with the insurgency, one of the big factors is Pakistan. In fact, Pakistan has about 80,000 soldiers in the areas adjacent to Afghanistan. Part of the reason why we are seeing more activity by the Taliban in our area is because the Pakistanis have been successful in starting to root some of them out.

There has to be an arrangement between Pakistan and Afghanistan to try and seal the border. What we are doing in Kandahar province, as the Brits move into Helmand province and as the Dutch move into the province north of us, is trying to move into every part of the province, so that the Taliban or the insurgents have no room to move. We are trying to press them out of the area.

With respect to the other command in control, essentially nothing is changing when it goes from Enduring Freedom to NATO. No units change. Nothing actually changes. It is all the same.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to pay tribute and offer my sincere condolences to the family of Captain Nichola Goddard, who died during an important military operation in the Panjwai region, about 20 kilometres west of Kandahar.

Recalling this unfortunate event, which took place west of the Kandahar region, brings me to the very heart of the matter, the Canadian soldiers, men and women, who have been in the Kandahar region for a while and whose presence there is requested for another two years. When the defence minister said 12 years instead of two, perhaps he was revealing something he had not thought to.

It is important to know that the Kandahar region is quite large and has a population of some 1 million and that only a small part of the city is under Afghan rule. I mention this because the 13 districts of the Kandahar region and the city of Kandahar are under the negotiated protection of various municipal councils—or *Choura*—that is, under the protection of the Taliban.

I have looked over the literature on the state of things recently, studies done in March and April 2006. What I see there is that, since 2005, the situation has gone downhill rapidly and that the Taliban, previously more or less blended into the population after the coalition attack routed them from power, are returning little by little. They are gathering momentum and thus transforming the situation in which Canadian soldiers and others have fought up to now.

One of the studies I saw was written by the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations. It quotes President Bush on a visit to congratulate the Afghan government, "You are inspiring others and the inspiration will cause others to demand their freedom".

• (1915)

Does this mean that the principle of democracy is contagious? Yet, just the day before, the chiefs of the Afghan secret service had reported that the activities of the anti-government forces were on the rise and were an even greater threat than at any other time since late 2001.

Government Orders

It mentioned also events or revelations such as the following:

An increasingly murderous rebel movement with hideouts in Pakistan where al-Qaeda leaders and Taliban members are found.

A corrupt and ineffective administration, without resources, and an obviously dysfunctional Parliament.

Levels of poverty, famine, poor health, illiteracy, inequality of the sexes that put Afghanistan at the bottom of the list of the world's countries.

I would like to mention a few details taken from the report published by UNDP in conjunction with CIDA.

Despite economic recovery (we cannot speak of growth in this case) in 2003 of between 10% and 12% of GDP—not taking into account drug revenues (because they are not included: they go up in smoke)—Afghanistan is ranked 173 out of the 178 countries in the 2004 UNDP Human Development Index .

With a GDP in the neighbourhood of \$200, life expectancy of 44.5 years (20 years less than in neighbouring countries and six years less than the average for least developed countries) and a literacy rate of 28.7%, Afghanistan ranks just above Burundi, Burkina Faso, Niger and Sierra Leone.

—these dismal indicators reaffirm that long-term conflicts are the most certain vectors of chronic underdevelopment. They are the indirect consequences of conflict and the absence of institutions in Afghanistan.

The report continues and I will quote another passage:

The first step in helping the Afghan people is to acknowledge the real security problems they face. On October 19, on the eve of the election in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, the American ambassador in Kabul, identified the challenges ahead for the newly-elected government: eliminating the Taliban threat, dismantling the remaining armed Afghan militia and fighting narcotics trafficking.

This could have been seen or heard here this evening, in terms of objectives. The report concludes:

We do not deny the security challenges ahead. However, the Afghan government's priorities should be employment, fighting the extreme poverty and deplorable standards of living, and eradicating inequality, so that all Afghan people may contribute to building the capacities of their state. Once the population is no longer threatened by poverty or terrorism, broader solutions, more than just military solutions, can be sought. The security interests of other nations are still not of interest to the Afghan people.

This was recently confirmed when the American government planned to eradicate drugs in Afghanistan by aerial spraying to destroy the crops.

However, this caused a revolt because there are practically no other sources of revenue. Furthermore, the course of action was not always tactful. One could say that the eradication of drugs in Afghanistan, which we favour, only managed to distance the population from the soldiers who were trying to enforce it.

● (1920)

The Taliban, for their part, exploit this.

The following quotation is worth noting, because the authors of the study are two professors. They say:

As well, the deployment of NATO troops outside Kabul may be thought of as a short-term solution to the violence that threatens coalition troops. However, it is not an adequate response to the security problems of the Afghans themselves. Ultimately, it should be the prerogative of the Government of Afghanistan to take charge of the security of the country.

Why do I emphasize this? Because it seems to me that we have to regard this proposed mission as part of an attempt to help the Afghan people, and not only as the solution to the security problem that might otherwise be felt here.

Afghanistan has received little international aid. Its economy and government are heavily influenced by drug traffickers. I will continue my list: huge arms stockpiles, despite the demobilization of a number of militias, the potential denial of the Islamic legitimacy

of the Afghan government by a clergy that feels marginalized, ethnic detention, and so on. I will stop there. There was a long list. Why such a long list? Because this mission in Afghanistan cannot be thought of solely from the perspective of Canada's interests. If we are talking about international solidarity, we must also think about what the interests of the Afghans are.

You know, I was a history professor and I have to stop myself from going on and on. I would therefore like to point out, very briefly, that the Afghan people have had an extremely miserable and insecure life for a long time. They have endured many acts of violence. They have had leaders who helped them to develop. They had a period of democratic development, of liberalization of the laws for women, of liberalization of social values, but then they endured numerous revolutions. I will not speak at length about the Russian invasion episode. I do, however, want to point out that the Russian invasion, to which the Mujahedin and Saudi Arabia, with help from the United States, put an end, is the source of what then became the Taliban. I point this out because some things being said here give the impression that hunting down the Taliban, apprehending them, eliminating them from the scene, will be an easy matter.

I would like to point out that the Taliban, this movement of religious young people—who can no longer all be young—are Pashtuns. I am coming now to what is the most important argument for our missions. A region like Kandahar is largely Pashtun. As I said earlier, they are starting to establish a presence in the various small municipalities and they are offering security.

So when Canadian soldiers—there are no more American soldiers there—and the British soldiers who are arriving, and French soldiers, meet with Afghan women and men, they will always have to remember that if they reach out, if they make friendly overtures, the Taliban may attack them.

● (1925)

I wish to point out that, in order to finally eradicate opium or simply to ensure soldiers can function in a normal way in Afghanistan, they must have the collaboration and support of the people. I have just described a situation in which this would be immensely difficult for them.

I would like that to be one of the questions being asked. Will this mission be prepared and equipped in the full knowledge of how it can help the Afghan people and how those people may accept it? This is one of the most important questions, which now brings me to the motion itself.

I must say that, on reading this motion, like half the members of the House, I was angry. It was chiefly the third consideration that raised a serious problem for me. It reads as follows:

(3) whereas these international efforts are reducing poverty, enhancing human rights and gender equality, strengthening civil society and helping to build a free, secure and self-sustaining democratic state for all Afghan men, women and children;

I found this paragraph excessive, to say the least. If at least it read “whereas these international efforts aim to—”.

Government Orders

For the past few years, the international community has been making efforts to help the so-called collapsed states. In doing so, we are trying to develop models of exporting democracy to countries where it has never existed or has existed only minimally. It is extremely dangerous, though, to turn ourselves into a new modern colonizer for democracy and development if we do not consult the general population with regard to international aid or military intervention.

How are soldiers, men and women, prepared to intervene in a given country, in a specific region, other than by kicking down doors, with their guns poised? We think it extremely important to put this question on the table and to be able to answer it.

Kandahar is a region to which the Taliban have returned and where the government is not established. How can we think that soldiers from Canada and Quebec—it seems the next batch will be from Quebec—will be able to fulfill the mission they are given? When we ask what the objectives of the missions are, we are told that we know what soldiers do. But what are the real objectives of the missions? Are we sending them on an impossible mission?

I would like to say something else, something I read recently. I do not want to underestimate the progress that has been made in Afghanistan, notably in education, but also in health, where there has been some improvement.

● (1930)

As for the rest, the situation as described is still dramatic, and security is immensely fragile.

As I still have one minute, I would ask that we also reflect on the question raised in the excellent speech by Gilles Duceppe, when he said that soldiers should be able to be in contact with the people. They need these people to fulfill the mission assigned to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I thank the hon. member. I probably should not have allowed her that last minute, even though she was entitled to it, because during that time she referred to a member by his name rather than the name of his riding.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. An old parliamentarian like me—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse for questions and comments.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the experienced member for La Pointe-de-l'Île. In my opinion, she showed her knowledge of the issue as well as her interest in defending the interests of Quebecers and Canadians abroad and the values shared by Quebecers and the whole country with regard to promoting respect for human rights and women's rights.

In her speech, the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île stressed that this was a long-term conflict. We know that the conflict in Afghanistan has been going on for a long time and that there have been very intense periods of armed conflict. In the end, the member demonstrated that breaking this cycle of violence was complicated.

I have a question for the member, who has just demonstrated her extensive experience. The mission has two objectives: to secure the

Kandahar region and to provide humanitarian aid. I would like to know how our troops can combine these two objectives.

● (1935)

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I am not at all convinced that soldiers should be looking after the humanitarian mission.

I am in touch with several NGOs that say that combined missions can be ineffective from the soldiers' standpoint. From the NGOs' standpoint, they become extremely dangerous because personnel are associated with soldiers.

To answer the question, this is not desirable. I know that it is done, but I am not certain that when an assessment is carried out at some point, the results will be positive.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin with a comment before asking the member a question. Like her, I support our soldiers.

When our soldiers ventured into Afghanistan or were invited there, my understanding was that they would be there for a limited period of time and that it would be difficult. I also understood that it would not necessarily be for a short period or for two or three years, but that Canada's participation would be prolonged.

I also recognize that a government must have the power to make this kind of decision. There is some information the members will never have access to. The Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the commander of our military forces will have secret information about our troops and our allies. This information cannot be provided during the few hours of this debate to enable us to make an informed decision.

However, as parliamentarians, we can hold an informed and extended debate to determine our future military role in the world as part of our foreign policy. The government would refer to it to decide whether soldiers should be sent to places like Afghanistan, Darfur and other parts of the world.

I invite the member to comment on this.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting question. I am sorry to say that since I have been in the House, the best information I have had access to has been what I have found on my own by reading several studies put out by foundations that provide a clearer picture of the situation.

I would never have received this information from Foreign Affairs—excuse me, I know what I am talking about—or from National Defence. Everything over there is a secret. That said, of course we should go as far as we can at that level to create opportunities to intervene and to act.

Mr. André Arthur (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île has given us a perfect illustration of the absurdity of conducting a humanitarian mission and carrying out a military operation at the same time. Based on what she just said I am even more ambivalent about what our government is doing and how our country comes across. I am very much aware of Canada's international reputation and I know that it is precisely through peace missions that Canada won the Nobel peace prize all those years ago.

Government Orders

However, when we choose to go to Afghanistan to punish terrorists who have attacked so cruelly, I wonder if we are in the right place or whether we are getting war mixed up with Olympics. In war, what is important is not to participate, but to win.

In that vein, I would like to point out in this House that the next contingent leaving for Afghanistan—according to the information available to us—is from my riding. The Valcartier garrison will likely be called to contribute. So, I ask the question seriously. By sending a garrison like Valcartier to a country like Afghanistan to carry out a mission that the Canadian public does not fully understand and that the Quebec public does not understand at all, are we not asking these soldiers to assume a responsibility that goes well beyond the training they have received, and certainly beyond the support they are getting and the equipment they have been given? The story in the Quebec City area is that soldiers leave Valcartier with their military gear and make it only two kilometres down the road before having to call a tow truck. If we send them to war, we must answer for the results.

I want to thank the hon. member for her history lesson and her eloquent illustration of the difficulty of conducting humanitarian missions with people who are armed with automatic weapons.

• (1940)

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have heard the new member intervene. I did not expect such an intervention, as his reputation preceded him. I must say I appreciated it, as I appreciate his attention.

There are many members in attendance and I am pleased. I would like to add that the sort of debate we are having this evening is uncommon. However, at the most recent debate, we agreed that the soldiers would remain there until 2007.

Could this same spirit not be recreated on the Standing Committee on National Defence, expanded perhaps with foreign affairs, in order to grasp the whole situation and ensure the public's questions, the ones they ask us, may be satisfactorily answered? That might create another frame of mind than the one created by this motion. In general terms, it makes the opposition members feel they have to provide a blank cheque, with the knife to their throat. That should not be how a vote is run. A vote is not a formality, it is a commitment.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Vancouver East for a very short question.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member has given us some very thoughtful comments tonight. I do not think that we should be allowing Canada to be dragged into a U. S.-style military combat role in Afghanistan, nor should we be supporting George Bush's failing strategy on the war against terrorism.

I do find it ironic, to say the least, that the Conservatives' motion tonight is couched in terms of women's equality and human rights. They have not exactly been the greatest champions of rights for women or human rights generally here in Canada or elsewhere. We also know that tonight we have heard from Afghan women in Canada who are very concerned about this mission because it is

increasing violence and instability. I wonder if the member would comment on that.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Unfortunately, the member for Vancouver East did not leave enough time for the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île to do so.

Resuming debate.

The hon. Minister of International Cooperation.

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my time with my colleague, the member for Macleod.

This evening I join my voice to that of all Canadians to express my sadness over the death of Captain Goddard.

Last April 10, I rose in the House to speak about some of Canada's accomplishments in Afghanistan. Today I want to repeat how convinced I am of the importance, appropriateness and effectiveness of our assistance for the Afghan people.

This is not the time to abandon the people of Afghanistan. Quite the opposite: Canada must show leadership and compassion, not indifference.

[English]

Canada's role in Afghanistan is consistent with the support we provide worldwide with respect to freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights. The Government of Canada believes that our country must continue to play a meaningful leadership role in Afghanistan.

We are part of the 36 nations that have made progress in Afghanistan under the auspices of the UN and NATO, but laying the foundations of democratic and economic development takes time and requires ongoing commitment.

• (1945)

[Translation]

More than 20 years of conflict, grave human rights violations, widespread poverty, and year after year of drought have destroyed nearly all sectors of society.

The reconstruction and development of a devastated country like Afghanistan is no easy task. It is important to emphasize that Canada is helping to make Afghanistan secure. That is an essential prerequisite for reconstruction.

Thanks to our integrated approach involving diplomats, the Canadian Forces, development experts and civilian police officers, we are helping the Afghan people stabilize their country, improve its governance and reduce poverty.

There are three complementary aspects to Canada's commitment: security support, diplomacy and development assistance.

Government Orders

A few short years ago under the harsh Taliban regime, Afghan women were reduced to poverty. Their basic right to freedom of movement was taken away. Their confinement had many negative effects: their physical health and morale deteriorated and their life expectancy fell; women did not have the right to work and had to give up their roles as teachers, health professionals and merchants; the social fabric disintegrated.

Under the Taliban regime, women did not have the right to practise medicine and did not even have access to medical care. Little girls could not go to school, because all the schools for girls had been closed.

But since the fall of the Taliban, over four million children, a third of them girls, have gone back to school.

Thanks to the financial support of Canada, women's centres have opened all across Afghanistan. These centres help women by providing them with basic services such as literacy training, health services, legal aid, shelter, and sometimes simply a place to talk where they feel safe and supported.

CIDA also supports food aid and training programs which have benefited over 10,000 widows and their families.

This sort of progress is important because, although the context is more open now, there continues to be opposition to women's rights and women's access to the labour market.

Like our 35 allies, our objective is to ensure that the Afghan government can implement its policies and ensure the viability of its development.

To ensure that sustainable results are achieved in Afghanistan, Canada is working in line with the priorities laid out by the Afghan government in its national development strategy. The Afghan government has in fact congratulated Canada on choosing this approach, which allows the Afghans to take charge of their own development.

The CIDA programs in Afghanistan are designed to help the Afghans meet the challenges they are facing. Canada has demonstrated its capacity to help the Afghan people, whom we must support.

Living in a country where war has raged for many years, the Afghans—women and children in particular—have suffered under one of the most repressive regimes in the world. Despite noteworthy advances, the country remains one of the poorest in the world.

Through CIDA, Canada is contributing to the development and improved well-being of the Afghans, but our commitment is producing effects that are much broader and more lasting.

Thanks to its development assistance, Canada has been able to make key contributions to security, governance and public order, as well as to social and rural development. The Canadian aid program in Afghanistan is delivered in a responsible fashion. I want to assure this House that that is one of my priorities.

CIDA is working to ensure that the administration of Canadian aid to national Afghan programs is based on effective mechanisms. CIDA is closely monitoring the performance of priority programs,

particularly those on microlending and rural development. We are able to make the best use of Canadian contributions thanks to effective financial controls and appropriate accountability structures.

• (1950)

[*English*]

Canada must continue to have a positive impact on the development of Afghanistan and build on the progress made so far.

[*Translation*]

For example, with an increased commitment, Canada will continue to be a leader in microfinance and financial services, especially for Afghan women in rural communities.

Canada will continue to make a major contribution to security, particularly in the areas of demining and ammunition destruction, and to governance and promotion of women's socio-economic rights, including basic education.

Canada can also keep on playing a leading role in supporting the democratic process in Afghanistan and especially in developing institutions by strengthening the capacity of Afghan parliamentary institutions, for example.

Canada will also continue to be on the lookout for new opportunities to cooperate with non-governmental organizations and other Canadian partners in Afghanistan. We will continue to promote principles that reflect Canadian values we take pride in, such as respect for human rights, gender equality, freedom of speech and democracy, the same principles to which the Afghan people have shown their commitment, particularly in electing women to more than 25% of the seats in their new parliament.

I am convinced that our efforts are making tangible improvements in Afghans' lives. I am also convinced that Canada must make a commitment to continue supporting the Afghan people who still so desperately need our support.

This is not the time to leave the Afghan people in the lurch, to abandon the international community or to break with the Afghan government and our partners.

[*English*]

The time has come for all of us to rise on behalf of the Afghan people, to rise on behalf of the Afghan women and children. It is time to bring hope to the people of Afghanistan and help build a more secure world for our children.

[*Translation*]

The Afghan people need Canada today. They are counting on us to give them hope.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for giving this speech.

In his speech, the Prime Minister talked about an additional expenditure of \$310 million for development assistance in Afghanistan. A lot of us share this concern, that is, whether this government will follow a policy providing not only for military action in the region, but also for aid to complement what our military are doing.

Government Orders

My question is pretty precise. With this supplementary aid, does the government intend to spend money to the extent that it can in regions where our troops are making valiant efforts? The present fact is that, concerning aid, the Americans and others are much more present in the Kandahar region than we Canadians are. If our troops are there, it seems to me that our aid should follow the actions of our troops. I would like to know the government's position on this subject.

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, in fact we did announce additional aid worth \$310 million for the Afghan people as a whole. Certainly, to implement our programs and ensure security for the people, both in Kandahar and outside that region, we need the security provided by our troops there.

Indeed, I can assure my colleague, member of the opposition, that we are making sure that all Afghan people receive services in accordance with the measures and NGOs in place and according to the availabilities of the population.

• (1955)

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her remarks.

I admit that some questions do arise, and I will quickly ask her three.

Would the minister be so kind as to share some assessment criteria with this House?

We know that there are NGOs in Afghanistan. We also know that they have access to some \$100 million in funds. The problem is the criteria by which to determine that the operation has been successful. Is there a formal assessment, prepared by the minister's department? If so, could she undertake to present those assessment criteria in this House so that we can share them with our fellow citizens? One would imagine that they have been set out in writing.

Second, does she not feel it is a little premature to ask this House to vote on this matter. I will reword my question: why this urgency, which one might suspect conceals some cleverly partisan motivations that would mean that this House must now commit itself for two more years, when we have very little information about the criteria that we should be guided by in continuing this action?

Once again, let us proudly say: the House is not divided between those who believe in international solidarity and those who do not. Everyone believes in this.

In other words, can the minister present some assessment criteria and does she agree that asking us to vote for two more years has an unfortunate air of haste?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In his effort to obtain information, the member for Hochelaga has left the minister one minute and 20 seconds.

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, when I see Bloc members flip-flopping this way, I wonder who might have partisan motives in mind.

That being said, if the member wants assessments, he could contact the organization Rights and Democracy in Montreal, for example, not far from where he lives. It has succeeded in opening a number of women's centres all over Afghanistan. Through those

centres, Rights and Democracy has already trained more than 6,000 women so that they can explain to their peers that they have the right to go to school, to speak and to live in security.

That is only one example among many others. CARE Canada has also provided support for more than 10,000 widows and their families.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to echo the comments of many of the previous speakers in offering my personal condolences to the family of Nichola Goddard. It is with sadness that we received that news today and we offer our condolences to her family, friends and comrades.

I am pleased to participate in this evening's debate. I believe that in extending Canada's diplomatic, development and security mission in Afghanistan we will help to ensure a secure and prosperous future for Afghans.

The situation in Afghanistan is a matter of importance to all Canadians. I welcome this opportunity to express my views and to clearly record where I stand on this important matter.

With the help of Canada and the international community, Afghanistan is emerging from years of war and destruction. It is embracing democracy and taking the lead in ensuring that development benefits are extended to all regions of the country.

Since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan has advanced considerably in its reconstruction. Canada has supported the country's progress through a comprehensive approach that combines security, diplomacy and development assistance. However, while the Afghan people have made progress, they continue to need our support.

Afghanistan and our 35 allies in Afghanistan are looking to Canada to extend our mission. There will be a new command structure and a new diplomatic and development commitment and so it is important to seek the approval of the Parliament of Canada by voting on the motion that we are now debating.

The Dutch and the British, two other countries with leadership roles in Afghanistan, have already renewed their commitment. Our NATO allies now need to know what Canada is prepared to do.

By extending our mission in Afghanistan, we will show that we are continuing to play a leadership role. We will provide a signal to NATO and the Afghan government that they can count on us as they begin planning the next move to ensure that Afghanistan achieves the peace and stability that will allow its people to prosper in the future.

Canadians and the Afghan people should together be very proud of their accomplishments to date but we must continue to work together for continued success.

On March 9, the Minister of International Cooperation announced that CIDA will maintain its funding in Afghanistan at \$100 million for the years 2006-07. This brings Canada's total contribution to \$656 million since 2001. With CIDA's contribution, Afghanistan has seen many changes.

Government Orders

I would like to outline some of these changes and successes that have occurred in Afghanistan. It is vital that the Canadian people, as well as my colleagues here in the House of Commons, understand the significance of their contribution and the work that has been done.

Afghanistan took a very important step and has adopted a new constitution. It has also held presidential and parliamentary elections. The national solidarity program has provided to more than half of all Afghan villages and roughly 150,000 families access to funding for basic needs such as health clinics, roads and water wells. Over 4.5 million children are enrolled in formal schools. Over 150,000 Afghans, a large majority of whom are women, have access to credit and financial services.

As a farmer, I am personally pleased with the work we are doing to help the farming community of Afghanistan. We recognize that work needs to be done for the farmers to produce their crops in quantities sufficient to market them for broad sale and distribution. For that reason, our efforts include financing and rural infrastructure, such as roads and irrigation systems, to make it easier for those farmers.

National programs are also offering these farmers assistance so that they can purchase seeds and fertilizer. By encouraging them to focus on crops, such as fruit, nuts, vegetables and grain, they are able to feed their families.

I believe that the country's farmers, with our help, will make a significant contribution to returning stability to Afghanistan.

• (2000)

This is not the time to abandon the Afghan people, quite the contrary. We need to show leadership and compassion, not indifference. We must also work to ensure that the Afghan people are able to look after themselves once Canada is no longer there. Sustainable development is key to their future.

Through the provincial reconstruction teams, the PRTs, CIDA has designated resources of up to \$10 million for a confidence in governance program. This program is focused on creating an environment where government led programs at the national, provincial and village levels can begin to flourish. As part of the program, grants are provided to disenfranchised communities so they can begin work projects which they themselves have identified as priorities.

Through its development assistance, Canada has been able to make key contributions to governance and sustainable development in Afghanistan. It is important to remember that by helping Afghanistan to become a stable, democratic and autonomous state, we are helping to ensure that it will never again be used as a haven for terrorists.

While the Afghan people have made progress, the need for our support is still there and it is vital that we extend our mission. Canadians should be proud of all that we are accomplishing in Afghanistan and be prepared to continue our support.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member gave us numbers on the contributions Canada has made recently and the new contribution that his government is prepared to

make over the next two years. How does that compare both militarily and domestically with what the Dutch and the Brits are bringing to solve the problems in Afghanistan? Are we the leaders in the area of retraining the domestic side in particular?

We see the military getting most of the headlines on what we are doing on that side, but on the other side is reconstructing the economy on the domestic and humanitarian side. How does our contribution compare to those of the other allies in Afghanistan?

• (2005)

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that our commitment, certainly militarily and through development, is very significant. I also understand that we are ahead of the Dutch, but the Brits have actually donated more. As far as actual dollars, I do not know what the exact amount is but I am sure those numbers could be provided.

The thing that we need to remember is the commitment to the quality of people that we are sending. I have spoken to a number of the opposition members who were over there and they speak very highly of the quality of the troops, the well-trained personnel and United Nations people who know what they are doing in delivering the aid. It is the same as what this government is basing a lot of its decisions on. It is not necessarily the dollar amount as much as the quality of the delivery, the value of the dollars and people that we are putting into that field. We bring a force of military and development people who are second to none in the world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his presentation. I would also like to remind the House that we in the Bloc Québécois are demanding an enlightened debate to provide answers to questions that have gone unanswered. We have a motion before the Standing Committee on National Defence where experts and National Defence employees will testify.

At present, we are being treated to an unacceptable manoeuvre seeking to hasten a decision. We are having a six-hour debate. A matter of this importance requires true sharing of information.

My question is as follows: Will the member agree that what the Prime Minister and the government are asking—to extend the military mission in Afghanistan by two years—is tantamount to writing a blank cheque or turning a blind eye to the information to which Parliamentarians and Canadians are entitled?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, certainly it is a valid question that we need to know what the costs are. We have had five years to analyze our involvement in this commitment. This debate just caps it off.

Canadians are committed to helping the people of Afghanistan. My constituents are saying to me that those people need help. The farm that I referred to in my speech, when one of my neighbours was in trouble, I did not ask myself what it would cost to go and help. I immediately went and helped. That is what neighbours do.

Government Orders

This is a large world. We are a neighbour to these people. They have less than we have. They are being hurt. The least we can do is help them and help them in every way we can and help them now. If we leave the Afghans on their own for months while we dither about a decision, how many more lives will be lost? We need to make that decision now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before resuming debate, I would like to share with the House my pleasure in noticing for this important debate some Cubs in the gallery. I do not know who they are, but they are good citizens. I thank them for being here.

● (2010)

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my good friend and colleague, the member for Cape Breton—Canso.

I join with all members of the House in expressing our pride, our concern, our support and our respect for the many Canadians serving in Afghanistan and who have served there over the last number of years. They are military personnel but they are also humanitarian aid workers, civilian police, members of the Canada Corps monitoring elections and other good governance advisers.

I intend to vote against this motion tonight. Having listened carefully to members speak today and throughout this evening, I do believe that a decision on this motion is premature. We have many months before we have to make this decision. To rush this debate with 36 hours' notice, with six hours of debate to make a life and death decision of this seriousness is a request to make an uninformed decision. The defence committee itself asked to hear expert witnesses to give information on how we are doing, what we intend to do, where we are going, what our exit strategy is, so that we can make an informed decision. That request was denied.

We need to hear from all of the relevant committees hearing witnesses before them from government and outside of government, to find out where we are and where we are going. It is disrespectful if we are asked to make a decision without this information. It is disrespectful to members of Parliament and through us to the public of Canada. Most of all, it is disrespectful to those brave Canadians who are serving or will go to serve in Afghanistan. That disrespect is dangerous. It is putting them in danger without our making an informed decision and having the respect to do that and demand that. In that sense it is unprincipled.

There is a principled reason that we are in Afghanistan right now. It is principled on the best principles of humanitarian intervention as they have developed over the last decade. Canada and members of this chamber have been participants in defining those new principles of humanitarian intervention. It is a just cause.

With those principles in mind, we fashioned a new international policy statement. Canadians in Afghanistan at this time are putting into practice for the first time the international policy statement developed by the previous government. It combines security forces with humanitarian aid workers, with good governance advisers, with civilian police trainers so that it is integrated, so that it is effective.

What is the principled approach going forward before we extend this mission? The principled approach is to get the necessary

information to make an informed decision. Take the time that is necessary.

We have heard reference to the Dutch decision to extend. The Dutch parliament did not have 36 hours' notice for a six hour uninformed debate without witnesses, without adequate information. It was debated for 10 months. What is the rush at this time? We need the analysis once we have the information. Then we need to plan the next phase, the role definition, the objectives, the benchmarks, the exit strategy. What do we do in the next situation?

We have the time. We owe it to those Canadians who are bravely serving in Afghanistan and those who will in the future. We owe it to the Afghan people. It is our responsibility in pushing forward to protect as an international norm. We owe it to all of those interests.

In coming to this decision, and I think it is a principled one, I have been advised by my constituents of Vancouver Quadra in a way that is unprecedented in my, albeit short, five year experience in the House. In the last 24 hours I have had more immediate, voluminous and unanimous communication from my constituents to vote against this motion.

● (2015)

I had one single person, in a very advised way, suggest that I support it in a conditional way. I am advised by that and I take that very seriously, with my constituents, but with the principled approach of taking the time to be informed, to be principled, to be respectful, to be secure, and to go forward and take that time.

In voting against this motion tonight, I am not saying no as in "no, never". I am saying no as in "no, not now". It is disrespectful because it is uninformed, and it is therefore unprincipled, and I will not make that decision.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think perhaps the member might take up the issue of the 36 hours and the debate with the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the NDP, who all agreed, in consultation with the Prime Minister, that this debate take place. That is where the problem with the 36 hours before the debate lies, if he wants to know where.

Second, he talks about the fact that this is a unilateral decision. May I remind the member that it was only through this new Prime Minister, who said that he was going to bring these issues before this House so that the House could express an opinion, that we are here to give advice? The right to make this decision continues to belong to the Prime Minister of Canada. He has come to this House to take advice from this House.

I must say that I am unbelievably disappointed in this member, who was a part of the cabinet that made the unilateral decision in the first place to send our soldiers and our humanitarian workers into Afghanistan, into harm's way. How can he possibly stand and talk about a principled decision when in the first place he was part of the decision that was done behind closed doors?

At least our current Prime Minister is prepared to come before the people of Canada and show up the kind of hypocrisy that there is on that side of the House.

Government Orders

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I heard a question there, but let me respond to the issue of principle. Yes, the previous government took the principled decision on the best principles of humanitarian intervention to send our troops, together with our humanitarian aid workers and our governance advisers with the Canada Corps to supervise elections. Yes, that was principled, but it was time limited. There was a two year time limit.

If we are going to extend that, we owe it to those people, to the Afghans as well as the brave Canadians serving there and those who perhaps will be sent there in the future, to take the time, when we have it, to be informed and to be disciplined and respectful and therefore principled. No information is not respect.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before I recognize the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas, I would like to remind members that there are still Cubs in the gallery. They are depending on us to show them an orderly debate.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians are not supportive of Canada's military effort in Afghanistan. Many Canadians want to see a withdrawal of the Canadian Forces from Afghanistan. In fact, I am one of those Canadians. I oppose a new mission in Afghanistan, but I would also like to see a safe and immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan, starting now. I am glad that the member for Vancouver Quadra mentioned that he is now getting many communications from people in his riding. I suspect that many of them support this position.

Many Canadians know that this is not our traditional role of peacekeeping. This is not how Canadians do peacekeeping. We are out there to separate combatants, not to be a combatant, which we are now. We are there to support UN peacekeeping efforts, not to support the American Operation Enduring Freedom. We are there to deliver development aid, but not to deliver it by the military. That is not the Canadian way of doing development work. We are there to do democratic development, but not to do it at the end of the barrel of a gun. That is not the Canadian way.

How does the member for Vancouver Quadra respond to the many people in his constituency and in my constituency in British Columbia and across Canada who think that Canada should not be there now and that we should begin a safe and measured withdrawal from Afghanistan immediately?

• (2020)

Hon. Stephen Owen: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, I will say that we have made a commitment to be there until next February and we should honour it, but we should also consider in an informed, analytical, cautious and therefore principled way whether we should extend or whether we should come back in a safe and appropriate withdrawal.

That decision has yet to be made in an informed way. We hear the member from Kootenay suggest that the Prime Minister brought this into the House for a decision when all indications are that the decision has already been made. I think that is inappropriate. That is disrespectful. We should be trying to convince the government to give us the opportunity to be informed through the relevant committees so that we can make an informed and principled decision.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I begin my comments this evening by offering condolences to the family of Nichola Goddard, a soldier who was lost today, and certainly to her friends and colleagues. I know that tragedy like this is shared by all members in the chamber and indeed by all Canadians. I think tonight's tragedy further underlines the importance and significance of tonight's debate.

Certainly over the last evening, and then again all day today, we in the Liberal caucus have had an opportunity to discuss this very important motion placed before the House this evening. There is a wide array of interventions, of shared opinions, which I believe for the most part are intellectually shared, brutally intellectually and brutally honestly shared, I believe, but respectfully shared as well.

I understand that among my caucus colleagues there are concerns just with the process that has been put forward by the government in coming forward with this motion and with the expedience that is necessary with this particular motion.

We look back to the Dutch decision. That has been referenced several times this evening. They were 10 months in debating that outcome, that extension of two years, so there is some scepticism on this side as to whether or not this is a political ploy on the part of the government.

That said, I came to this debate this evening for two reasons. I came to make sure that our soldiers, our men and women in uniform, and the parents of our soldiers understand that we support them, that this party supports their efforts and that in fact we support their mission.

I have listened to the entire debate and I will say that I also came to this debate for assurances, because I supported the initial intervention. I understood the rationale behind the initial intervention. I came here this evening wanting several questions answered.

I wanted to find out if in fact the essence of the mission would be changed. I wanted to find out if in fact there was going to be a significant number of troops added to the mission. I wanted to find out, if we were asked by the UN to intervene in Darfur, in Haiti or one of the other hot spots in the world, that we would be able to do that.

What I got tonight from the Minister of National Defence and Minister of Foreign Affairs were their assurances that the essence of this mission would not change. All of us in the chamber know that the circumstances on the ground in Kandahar have changed. We understand that it has been amplified. It has become tougher, but if it were an easy job, it would not have been Canada that would have been asked to intervene. They would have asked a lesser country.

When things get tough, that is not the time to flinch, and that is why tonight I will stand to support the motion. We all wrestle with the same questions. People come to me all the time and ask what in the name of God our young men and women are doing in Afghanistan. Why are we in Afghanistan? I think that over time we have come to learn what troubles face that nation.

Government Orders

People are able to connect the dots when they watch the evening news and when they think back to 9/11. They know that Afghanistan was just a breeding ground for terrorism. They know that terrorist cells were rampant within that country. When they look at the pictures on TV, they see the squalor, the poverty and the hunger. They see women being abused and terrorized. As for education in Afghanistan, there was virtually no public education system five years ago. People here understand that and they know that at the root of the squalor is the lack of education.

• (2025)

Therefore, we could not stand idly by. That is why I supported this intervention initially. We did not go over there on our own accord. It was a unilateral intervention. We were asked by the UN to join in a NATO mission. We stood, we did the best we could, and we have made a tremendous impact.

Canadians must know that we are making a difference there. For anyone watching this debate tonight it has been articulated. They can see the increase in democracy and in the governance systems. We have been able to make inroads in working with the judicial system. Reference was made to the lack of a public education system. Now 3 million children are enrolled school.

We had a significant take note debate in April in the House. It garnered full support from all parties in the House for the troops and for the mission.

I spoke with the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming earlier. He had the opportunity to travel to Afghanistan and had been in Kabul. He has seen the things that are taking place now. People are walking the streets. They are doing commerce on the streets. Life is far from normal, but far improved from where they were four years ago.

Kandahar is where Kabul was four years ago. It has been tough. There has been sacrifice for sure, but Canadians have made a difference. We have developed infrastructure. We have invested, as I said, in education and fresh water. We have addressed human rights issues. We have been able to do that over the last number of years. As Canadians, I believe it is expected of us to stand until the job is complete.

I want to identify with the troops. In my riding of Cape Breton—Canso we have a great number of young men and women who have volunteered for the cause and have pursued a career in the armed forces. In my conversations with them, they understand the great task that they face in Afghanistan, but they are up to task.

I want to read to the House an interview that took place this morning on CBC Radio. The House was very saddened when we lost Corporal Paul Davis, a 28 year old who was killed when his armoured vehicle collided with a taxi and flipped over near Kandahar. He left behind a wife and two young girls. It was a sad event. His dad, Jim Davis, is very well known to many of the Nova Scotia MPs in the House and is very respected. He is a great Canadian and obviously a great father. In the interview this morning, Jim Davis said that he hopes all the political parties agree to extend the mission. He said:

I know our troops over there do like to know that they are supported by Canadians at home. The bottom line is, you want a united effort behind this mission.

I respect each member's decision, as they stand and vote this evening, but I want to reiterate that I will be supporting the motion.

• (2030)

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that besides having courage over in Afghanistan, there are some people who have a little courage in the House this evening as well.

I have worked on a project with the member for Cape Breton—Canso in the past. We collaborated and saw some action. I will commit to him that I will try to continue that action.

I will relay a story to him and get him to comment on it because he is on the right track. I was conversing with a soldier in Afghanistan. He was part of the troop that was involved in one of the first accidents over there, when people were very seriously hurt. He was explaining how automatically the training they had been given kicked in and how it was absolutely impressive to see that happen under fire.

He also talked to me about going into the communities in Afghanistan and working with the children and the people who had nothing. Even though the troops supplied them with very little, the people were so grateful to receive it. He described that as being the face of Canada.

Could the member comment on that aspect of it? We are seeing some positive results and we are going to be able to measure those results. We are going to see that we are making a difference.

His comments tonight in support of this extension are very valiant and faces some of the other comments from members of his own party. Would he comment on the feeling that he gets when he talks to the troops and people in Afghanistan?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, indeed my colleague and I worked together on a project for another group of heroes, our firefighters. Hopefully we can resurrect that in this Parliament.

When we talk to the brave men and women who have seen action in the theatre, they understand they are making a difference in the lives of individual. In order to impact on the bigger picture, it is little victories, one by one. That is what is imperative.

Kabul has come a long way. It has shown tremendous improvement in a great number of areas. Kandahar remains a challenge, but I know there are victories to be had there.

I want to quote my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood. It came out in our caucus meeting today. It will probably be in the *Globe and Mail* tomorrow, but regardless, it is worth repeating and getting it on the record. His comment was that there was no military solution for Afghanistan; however, there was no solution in Afghanistan without the military. That is the truth about Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I feel as if I am listening to someone who is leaving out a lot of information. I would like to give him the opportunity to elaborate on his position.

Government Orders

In fact, I would like him to take this opportunity to tell us much more, particularly when he states that we have made a difference in Afghanistan and that he feels there has been a positive impact on that country. Could he explain this in much more detail, rather than just spouting such phrases that may ultimately prove to be unfounded? I am giving him the opportunity to tell us a little more on this subject.

• (2035)

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I tried to share with the House some anecdotal information, but I know, for example, that in areas of democracy, we are over there to try to support a fragile democracy. When we look back over the past four years, we now have 12 million people who have registered for a democratic process.

I talked about how there was virtually no public school system four years ago. There now are three million students registered in the public school system who go to school each day. One-third of those are young females. We did not see that four years ago, so there are obvious improvements—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to have the opportunity today to speak in support of extending our important mission in Afghanistan. As we have all become too aware in recent years, we live in an unstable and unpredictable world, where terrorists operating from failed states can strike anywhere in the world, including here in North America.

On September 11 our vulnerability to terrorism was fully exposed. Among the thousands who lost their lives that day were 24 Canadians. Since then, terrorists have struck in the heartland of several of our closest NATO allies, killing hundreds of innocents in Spain, Turkey and Great Britain, as well as many other places around the world.

We also must not forget that Canada has been identified by al-Qaeda as a target. The present threat to Canada must be taken seriously. However, the government also takes its responsibilities to defend our nation seriously.

Let me be clear. When it comes to defence and security, the government believes in putting Canada first. We will not stand by and allow others to decide the fate of Canadians. That is why the government is committed to strengthening our independent capacity to defend our national sovereignty and security.

As a result, Canada is prepared to meet threats to its security anywhere in the world. That is an important part of the reason why we are in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

The troops we have deployed to Afghanistan, along with our diplomats and humanitarian workers, have helped the Afghan people elect a responsible government to replace the aggressive Taliban regime.

• (2040)

[English]

And let us not forget that the Taliban provided training facilities and safe haven to the terrorists behind the September 11 attack.

I will be sharing my time, Mr. Speaker, with the member for Calgary East.

[Translation]

Today, Canada's objective in Afghanistan is still to prevent the country from becoming once again a haven for terrorists and their destructive network. As such, our soldiers in Afghanistan are protecting Canada and Canadians. We are in Afghanistan to offer humanitarian aid and to lay the foundations for the country's economic, social and democratic development. We are there to demonstrate Canada's leadership role in the world. We are there because it is in our national interest.

[English]

Canada has more than 2,000 men and women in Afghanistan. Most of them are in the Kandahar region, a known Taliban stronghold. Our soldiers serving there truly believe in our mission. They know that their efforts are bearing fruit. These brave soldiers, sailors and airmen and women are true heroes, heroes who are putting their lives on the line to protect the lives of their fellow Canadians here at home.

We are proud of our fighting men and women and we are grateful for the sacrifices they are making to defend us on the other side of the world.

Our mission in Afghanistan includes activities from humanitarian assistance to rebuilding roads and institutions. Our mission would be impossible without the Canadian Forces.

Our soldiers are helping to create the security environment that will allow the Afghan people to live safe lives and rebuild their communities. They are working for the return of stability to the country. They are also preventing insurgents from disrupting the establishment of this secure environment.

We are also making substantial progress in development and diplomacy. For instance, Afghanistan is the single largest recipient of Canadian development assistance, with \$656 million pledged since 2001. Our government will allocate an additional \$310 million, raising Canada's total contribution to nearly \$1 billion over 10 years.

[Translation]

Canadian diplomats in Afghanistan are also helping the Afghan people rebuild their political institutions. To support our diplomatic affairs, we will establish a permanent embassy in Kabul.

[English]

Individual Canadians, and the private organizations they support, are also doing their part to help Afghans. For example, CARE Canada has people on the ground involved in food distribution, road construction, irrigation system repair, erosion control, water and sanitation system rehabilitation, home schooling and growing small businesses. These efforts must not be allowed to lapse in February.

Government Orders

With the help of Canada and the international community, the Afghan people are triumphing over tyranny and taking back their country. The signs of progress are clear. Shattered communities and lives are being put back together with international help and reconstruction efforts are helping reduce poverty and misery.

Schools, hospitals and roads are being rebuilt. Millions of people are now able to vote. Women are enjoying greater rights and opportunities than were ever imagined under the Taliban. Close to four million refugees have returned home.

Clean water is a growing reality for thousands of villages. Tens of thousands of small arms and heavy weapons have been collected and secured. Land mine removal is under way and more than 4.5 million Afghan children, more than one-third of them girls, are now enrolled in school. Last but not least, critical instruments of national security such as the Afghan national army and the Afghan national police are increasing their capabilities, and reaching out to all areas of Afghanistan. Canadians are playing a key role in their training.

These efforts are showing positive results. They have undeniably enhanced the ability of the Afghan security forces to respond to threats, whether they are terrorist threats to the new Afghan national assembly, or drug lords pursuing their illicit trade. Our efforts to help bring security to Afghanistan, strengthen governance, and reduce poverty are making a real difference in the lives of Afghans.

That is why the House should support the government's decision to extend and expand Canada's mission in Afghanistan to February 2009. Through this decision we are demonstrating to our allies and the rest of the world that Canada is a country that can be counted on in tough times.

Canada's history is filled with examples of how we have accepted our responsibilities, be they at home or overseas. We have always been willing to help those in need and we have always been steadfast in our support for democracy, individual rights and the rule of law.

We know that some think we should retreat from Afghanistan and devote ourselves exclusively to our own domestic affairs. They speak of costs and casualties. Let me tell them this. Yes, there is a cost to protecting Canada, our freedom and our interests. There has always been a cost, but they are mistaken if they think we can separate ourselves from the real world and the real threat to Canadians.

Others suggest that extending the mission there to 2009 for a total of seven years since Canadians first put boots on the ground is too long. To them, I say there was a Canadian military presence in Cyprus for 30 years. For 33 years Canadian troops kept the peace in the Golan Heights. While our Afghan mission will take only a fraction of that amount of time, it is clear that in the pursuit of lasting peace and security, our Canadian commitments must not be arbitrarily constrained.

A Canada first defence policy means accepting that Canada must engage in an often dangerous world beyond our peaceful shores, that we have responsibilities when it comes to international peace, security and stability.

The Canadian commitment in Afghanistan is a clear demonstration of how Canada can be counted upon to act on these

responsibilities. Afghanistan must have the opportunity to develop into a more stable, secure and democratic state so that it does not again become a base for tyrants and terrorists.

I urge all members to support this motion, and may God keep our land glorious and free.

• (2045)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear about one thing. I am supportive of our mission and our troops, but the mission we spoke about in the House a little over five weeks ago was to end in February 2007.

The government is asking for a new and expanded mission without even consulting Canadians from coast to coast to coast. As a member of Parliament I am insulted by the fact that we have only six hours to deal with such an important issue as this, an issue that we should be discussing with Canadians and receiving their opinion. My own constituents have not been consulted about this expanded mandate. I am frustrated that, given the limited time, I will not even be able to speak on this issue but only be able to get my views across by asking a question. It is extremely frustrating.

The government is asking for a blank cheque. The Prime Minister likes to talk about the Dutch, but the Dutch had 10 months to debate this issue. The Prime Minister is giving us six hours to debate the merits of this important and critical expanded mission.

I feel that my rights and those of my constituents have not been heard. I feel sad about this particular debate. The Prime Minister talked about the fact that this was requested by NATO. We do not know that NATO has requested it. Has there been a letter from NATO? Has anybody seen a letter from NATO? There has been no request.

The member said he was concerned about our image internationally, but we are being laughed at by the fact that we are not respecting the Kyoto protocol and not going forward on it.

I am curious to find out where the member wants to go in terms of our commitment. Does he not feel that we should have a proper debate instead of just a six hour debate?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I understand that emotions are running high and we want to address this matter with the seriousness that it deserves.

In his opening remarks the member mentioned that we are expanding the mission. I want to clarify for his benefit and perhaps all those who are watching tonight that we are not in fact expanding this mission. We are simply extending the mission beyond its current mandate. Let there be no mistake. That is what we are doing. We are not trying to carve off more of a responsibility than we currently accepted. We just want to continue that responsibility.

What is happening this evening is historic. When the troops were first dispatched to Afghanistan four or five years ago, there was no debate in this Chamber. There was no discussion. There was no six hour debate or two hour debate. There was nothing. There was no vote at that time either. What is happening this evening is actually very historic.

Government Orders

With all due respect to my colleague, our troops have been in Afghanistan for nearly five years and during that period of time there has been ample opportunity for all members of this Chamber to evaluate the progress that we have made there. We are simply trying to extend that mission while respecting the security needs of our operations in the process.

I notice the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore is here this evening and I appreciate his presence—

● (2050)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member knows that we do not mention the presence or absence of other members in the House.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Thank you for that reminder, Mr. Speaker.

I want to quote what the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore said some time ago because it gets to the core of the issue here. A lot of members have talked about the need for increased development assistance to Afghanistan or other nations, but the reality is there cannot be that sort of development without a secure environment. It simply does not exist. People of good faith and people of goodwill will not enter into that environment without knowing that their lives are not at risk.

I quote from *Hansard* of April 10, 2006, not that long ago. The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore said:

What I learned there is that we cannot do development in Afghanistan unless we control the security situation. The schools and clinics we build by day are burned down by night unless we have the troops to secure the development gains we have made.

That is exactly what we are talking about here. We are making tremendous gains in Afghanistan and we want to continue to do so. We can only do so if our men and women in uniform are there playing a key role.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before we resume debate, I would like to ask the cooperation of all members that during the question and comment period we restrict the length of the comments, so that there can be more questions and more answers. Right now I am resuming debate and I recognize the hon. the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I join all Canadians in expressing our deep sadness and sorrow at the loss of a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan. We will all remember her sacrifice.

Canada's commitment to Afghanistan is consistent with Canada's support of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world. We are playing a leadership role in Afghanistan. Under the umbrella of a UN-NATO mission, 36 nations, including Canada, have made much progress to date, but laying the groundwork for democratic and economic development takes time and requires sustained support.

Our brave men and women in Afghanistan are helping to make Afghanistan safe for reconstruction. With our integrated approach consisting of diplomats, the Canadian Forces, development workers and civilian police, Canada is helping the Afghan people bring stability to their country, strengthen governance and reduce poverty. We are there at the request of the Afghan government.

Already we have made a significant contribution to the stabilization and reconstruction efforts. Yes, the mission is complex and risky and yes, it is definitely very different from the situations in the past. The world became a much less predictable place. The nature of the threat has changed, but we must not waiver in our resolve.

On September 11, 2001 it became painfully clear that Canada and Canadians were vulnerable in a way we had never thought possible before. We know we must defend and secure Canada at home, but we must also know that we must deal with threats abroad. This means dealing with threats in Afghanistan.

The terrorists who implemented the September 11 attacks trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. The al-Qaeda terrorist network, financed and inspired by Osama bin Laden, found a welcome haven under the Taliban government of Afghanistan. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan with an iron fist, first denying women opportunities for education or work, publicly executing people without due process, terrorizing an entire population and driving the country into the depths of poverty.

In late 2001 coalition forces, including Canadian forces, helped to drive the Taliban from power and into hiding in the remote hills of Afghanistan, and to crush the al-Qaeda network that it had harboured; crushed but not eliminated. The battle was won, but the international effort to stabilize Afghanistan has only just begun.

To ensure that Afghanistan was never again to be used as a haven for terrorism, it needed a democratically elected authoritative government. It needed the capacity to provide the rule of law, security and respect for human rights throughout the country. It also needed an economy capable of providing for the basic needs of the Afghan people and a capacity to curtail illicit opium production. This is a long term project that requires the long term commitment of the international community.

Afghanistan has achieved an enormous amount in only a few years. It has a new constitution. It has a democratically elected president and parliament. Its army is being rebuilt and its police forces are being retrained. Women and girls now have the freedom to go to school and legitimate businesses are emerging. Hospitals, schools and roads are being rebuilt.

With the help of Canada and the international community the Afghan people are triumphing over tyranny and taking back the country, but Afghanistan remains fragile. Taliban and al-Qaeda remnants continue to try to destabilize Afghanistan. Opium cultivation accounts for almost 60% of the country's GDP. We must stay the course until Afghanistan is able to withstand these pressures.

● (2055)

NATO has played a vital role in the achievements to date and will remain key to future progress in Afghanistan.

Government Orders

For Canada, our participation in NATO ensures that we have an equal voice in the world's strongest military alliance, one dedicated to defending the values that are fundamental to the United Nations and to Canadians, and one dedicated to addressing the new threats that we all face today.

None of us can go alone.

My government is very aware that our engagement in Afghanistan carries risks but we also know that what we are trying to do, to create a stable and secure Afghanistan that is no haven for terrorists, is worth those risks. It is because the long term security of Canada and Canadians is at stake.

I will conclude by offering my thanks to the Canadian men and women who are serving on our behalf in Afghanistan. We mourn for those who have died and we stand firm with those who continue to strive for peace and security in Afghanistan.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we look at Canada's reputation, for many years we, as a country and as a nation, have been the champions of human rights, of peace, of stability, of diplomacy and of democracy throughout the world. The Liberal Party and the previous Liberal governments have always been a champion in ensuring that those rights are upheld, along with our international reputation.

It is quite interesting that in the last 100 days, since the new Conservative government has been in power, Conservative members are all of a sudden concerned about our international reputation and Canada's foreign policy. If this was a priority for the government, why was it not listed as one of the top five priorities that Mr. Harper wanted to address? In addition to this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member has mentioned the right hon. Prime Minister by his name. I invite the hon. parliamentary secretary to respond to her question.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that the member for Brampton—Springdale would accuse my party of just having human rights now. If the member looks at the record she will see that we were the ones who supported the deployment in the first place. We stood behind democratic reform and we stood up for human rights. I find those comments intolerable.

I have no idea what she means when she talks about 100 days. It was her government and the prime minister before her when he was in the Persian Gulf who said that we would be there as long as there was no shooting and then we will leave. What kind of commitment is that? She is talking about human rights. We are not flip-flopping. We stand for human rights.

• (2100)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we understand that the conflict in Afghanistan has gone on since the attacks on September 11, 2001. All the efforts are meant in some way to punish the Taliban, who allowed groups of terrorists to train on Afghan territory. The government in place at the time no longer exists. These people are no longer in power.

We know now that the Taliban are in the South of Afghanistan and people say in the north of Pakistan, as well. The conflict could broaden.

As the conflict could deepen, could splinter, is there an exit plan to protect our soldiers in the event the conflict becomes like the war in Vietnam or Iraq?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as we have stated, we have three approaches to the Afghanistan crisis: military, development and building of democratic government in Afghanistan. Once we have achieved those objectives with our international partners we will be able to leave Afghanistan proudly.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Afghanistan, no doubt, is a country that needs assistance and I strongly support helping the people of Afghanistan. However, Canada is in Afghanistan, thanks to the previous government, in a combat role, a counter-insurgency role under U.S. command as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Many Afghans, including the Afghan Women's Organization, do not support Canada's combat role because it interferes with peace, security and rebuilding. I will vote against the motion tonight.

Why is the government ignoring the wishes of so many Afghan people and the majority of Canadians who want to return to security and peace building but not a counter-insurgency mission?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand how we can do development over there, how we can build schools and build whatever she is exactly saying about development without bringing security over there. Does she want human rights workers to be killed over there? What does she want? Our forces are helping in order to rebuild the country.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share my time this evening with the hard-working member for Ottawa Centre.

This time last week I was in Afghanistan in my dual capacity as the foreign affairs critic and the international cooperation critic for the New Democratic Party. I want to say that I was very grateful for that opportunity. I wish I had more time this evening to share some of those experiences but I know that as a result of the collapsed timetable and, I regret to say, a certain amount of political posturing by the government, we find ourselves in this debate this evening with restricted rules and no ability to amend the motion that is before us.

It creates howling from government benches but those are simply the facts which Canadians know.

Government Orders

This is an important opportunity this evening to talk about Canada's future role in Afghanistan. Let me say clearly that nothing in my short time in Afghanistan persuaded me that we ought not to have a role. In fact, I feel more strongly than ever that it is exceedingly important for us to engage constructively in a process of comprehensive peace-building. However, that is not what we are doing in Kandahar and that is one of the principal concerns that my party has in voting against the motion this evening.

My first thoughts on this occasion turn to the tragic loss of Captain Nichola Goddard in carrying out her service in Afghanistan. She paid the ultimate price. She sacrificed her life. I want to express my condolences to her family. I know her family includes the troops with whom she was serving, because we all know how close they become as members of a team working in harm's way on behalf of their nation.

My thoughts also turn to the families and the loved ones of those who are there now serving. In that regard, I want to quote briefly from a very thoughtful letter I received yesterday on the eve of this debate from the mother of a young man who is now serving in Kandahar. In part, this is what she says:

Every time I hear about an attack or an accident I do not rest until I receive word from my son. I'm sure every parent of a soldier serving in these high-risk areas feels the same. There are twenty or thirty checks of the computer a day, and prayers, and checks of...news.... I would be more in support of continuing to have our troops overseas in such circumstances, and serving as peacekeepers if I felt truly informed.

Unfortunately, we go away from this debate tonight with far fewer answers than we need as parliamentarians and Canadians need to be able to say that we are adequately informed.

She continues to say:

If I felt our soldiers weren't overextended, working murderous hours, and possibly becoming less effective and responsive as they succumb to exhaustion and the pressure of the situation [I would feel better].

Perhaps some of what I share will help...in tomorrow's debate over the extension of time [proposed] in Afghanistan. Again, I wonder why it's painted the way it is in the paper today - that if we choose not to extend the time, that means we don't support our military.

We must keep in mind that this is the mother of a young man serving today in Kandahar. She goes on to say:

The assumption is that it will filter to the troops who will feel we don't support them.

This idea that we aren't supporting Canadian troops is an illogical argument, one put forth to silence [legitimate questions] and to gain what the military leadership and the government wish...but is it in the best interest of Canadians.

She finishes by saying:

I support the military but I do not support the wasteful and senseless loss of Canadian lives. No amount of control over an Afghanistan village is worth the loss of my son's life or his health...to me as his mother. I support the military, support [genuine] peacekeeping, but not with callous disregard for the lives of our youths.

● (2105)

I am sure that those sentiments express the feelings of a great many parents and other loved ones of young people and people of all ages serving in Kandahar today.

Notwithstanding the incredible commitment, the competence and the courage of the young men and women serving today in Kandahar, I am deeply disturbed by both the nature and the tone of this debate tonight. I do not know which it is, but either wilfully or

out of ignorance, a great deal of misinformation and deception has been created here in this debate tonight by government members, and from time to time I regret to say, from members of the official opposition as well.

There have been many claims about how much our current mission has contributed to improved security and improvement in the lives of the people of Afghanistan. It is very important that we think about this as we contemplate our future commitments. As I have said, we need to make future commitments. We need to understand that the gains and the improvements that have been made in Kabul have not been made under an Operation Enduring Freedom mission, not under the U.S. search and kill aggressive combat effort that is in full flight in Kandahar. That is a very important thing for us to realize.

I am deeply disturbed that there has been no acknowledgement that there is indeed a difference and that it makes any difference whether we are there under a NATO led mission or whether we are there under Operation Enduring Freedom. I just about fell over when the defence minister stated that he considers the NATO and Operation Enduring Freedom missions as being the same.

For the record, here is the NATO agreed upon statement on the difference between the two missions. The ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force and Operation Enduring Freedom relationship is described as follows:

ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the ongoing US-led military operation in Afghanistan, will continue to have separate mandates and separate missions. ISAF will conduct to focus on its stabilization and security mission whilst OEF will continue to carry out its counter-terrorism mission. Clear command arrangements will coordinate, and where necessary deconflict efforts within the two missions as agreed under the auspices of the operational plan.

How could the defence minister possibly say it did not really matter whether we talk about one or the other? Actually, the Leader of the Opposition made more or less the same comment. He indicated that it did not really worry him that we were not operating under a NATO led mission.

Let me go further. There has been an attempt tonight on the part of the government to completely ignore, not acknowledge the fact that there is a raging debate going on within NATO around that counter-insurgency mission that is taking place in Kandahar. It is clear and it is acknowledged by everyone from Donald Rumsfeld to a recent report by the Council on Foreign Relations that there are serious problems with that counter-insurgency mission. In fact, President Karzai himself went to the U.S. and said it was time to put an end to it.

● (2110)

Let me end by saying that there is a reason people say that truth is very often the first victim of war. We have heard far too little in the way of concrete facts on the basis of which Canadians could feel reassured that the government knows what it is proposing we get into. It is clear that the responsible thing for us to do is vote against this motion because it is based on a flawed mission and is not revealing enough information.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Government Orders

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member for Halifax, the former leader of the New Democratic Party.

I was with her in Afghanistan. I know that she met with members of the Canadian Forces. I know that she spoke with representatives of CIDA who are doing important work. I know that she takes very seriously her role as a member of Parliament and someone who represents a constituency and community in Nova Scotia that has many proud representatives of the Canadian military.

I agree with much of her commentary about the need to do more on the capacity building and the development side. She knows, as I do, that education is the bridge, that the humanitarian efforts have to continue. Yet all of that happens because of defence and boots on the ground. I heard comments about misinformation and somehow disinformation coming from the government.

We are having an open debate here. The Prime Minister made his intentions very clear, unlike the government in the previous administration who had no debate and no vote on the subject, and deployed troops for two years in that capacity.

Amidst the rhetoric and the commentary tonight, I will read a quote from the hon. member, and it states, "It is not a question of should we be in Afghanistan. Yes we should. We need to be. We need to be in for the long haul". The member for Halifax said that three days ago, so what I would like to know, was the truth of that statement a victim of war or was it a victim of the usual NDP hypocrisy on deployment of troops?

• (2115)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question. Let me say that I did not just say that three days ago. I said that every day I was in Afghanistan and every day since. I absolutely think we need to commit to a long term—

An hon. member: How are you doing now?

An hon. member: You can't have it both ways.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Do I have the floor, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Halifax has the floor.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, to hear the foreign affairs minister of the Government of Canada say that we are going to bring about peace because of boots on the ground, the minister must know—and if he does not know, it is very worrisome—that peace is going to come about because we commit to a comprehensive peace process in which the military must have a role supporting the diplomatic work and the development work—

An hon. member: Without the military, without soldiers?

An hon. member: Alexa, give it up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. I invite the hon. member for Halifax to look at the Chair who has called order. I will assume that the question which was asked by the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs has been answered, and I now recognize the hon. member for York West.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to start—

An hon. member: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth is rising on a point of order. The Speaker would like to hear the point of order and the only way that the Speaker can understand the point of order is if he hears it clearly. So, I ask for the cooperation of all members. I will sit and listen.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the Speaker recall the advice of the Deputy Speaker earlier who reminded us that our troops and Canadians are watching this debate. I would remind Mr. Speaker that it is his duty to call upon those members who were interrupting the member who was just speaking and attempting to answer the question, heckling the member, that it is his obligation—and he is now cutting off my microphone. I find this unacceptable, sir, I find this unacceptable partisanship.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I take good advice from the hon. member's comments. I did hear heckling and I heard heckling from all parts and it was too much heckling. This is why I ended that heckling period and recognized the hon. member for York West for a new question, hopefully for a new reply. Thank you.

• (2120)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There was so much heckling and you were distracted doing something else and I had to sit down. And then I said, do I have the floor and I still didn't have—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Halifax is not rising on a point of order. She is arguing with the Chair.

I will take her advice under consideration, and if necessary, I will come back to the House. Right now I would like to finish this period of questions and comments and recognize the hon. member for York West.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I hope this is a point of order and not a point of debate.

I recognize the hon. member for West Nova.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, a distinguished member of the House called into question your impartiality. I believe it was wrong of that member to do so.

I would ask the member to reconsider it at some point and apologize to the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): As much as I appreciate that good member's advice, I have made a ruling and I still recognize the hon. member for York West. I hope she gets to ask her question and that she gets an answer. Thank you.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope my time was not taken away by all that debate.

Government Orders

May I begin by saying how supportive all of us in the House are of our troops and how grateful we are that we have men and women who are willing to put their lives on the line. I must say to the hon. member how much respect I have for the work that she has done over these many years on these very important issues. I know how passionate she cares about it.

My question for the hon. member is how do we deal with this issue? We have been forced into a debate that is a very serious one. We are not talking about raising or lowering taxes or dealing with the GST. We are talking about the lives of men and women who volunteer for our forces. Are we to make the right decision with the limited information, six hours of debate, when we spent eight days debating the budget, but we are only spending six hours debating the two year extension of a very important mission that many of us in the House support, and want to support, but have been given very limited information.

Would the hon. member tell me what other information she would require for her to feel that she is able to make an intelligent decision if in the future we have another opportunity to have an extension of this debate, rather than an extension without our being able to even discuss it further?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, what is required, and not just by members of the House, but Canadians require answers to a lot of the questions that have been raised here tonight that have not been addressed.

We need to hear some honest acknowledgment from the government that there is a raging debate at NATO about the future missions in Kandahar, that NATO in fact is having a great deal of difficulty getting other countries to come in. No wonder NATO is asking Canada to continue.

We need an acknowledgment that the Dutch have not gone in and the British have not gone in as scheduled because they had major concerns about the counter-insurgency effort being conducted under Operation Enduring Freedom. Even though Canada was willing to sign on to that uncritically, they were not and they are still not and they still have not gone in.

Furthermore, and it pains me to say this and I cannot imagine how it pains families of troops to know that as a result of that, many of our troops have been overexposed because not just the numbers of troops were not there to be part of that mission, but the capabilities that the Dutch and the British would have brought to it are different and in combination could have made for safer circumstances. I think we are not hearing enough of the truth about these matters.

I also have yet to hear a single word come out of the mouth of the foreign affairs minister or the defence minister about how a comprehensive—

• (2125)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. I recognize the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand before this House as the member for Ottawa Centre, the son of a World War II veteran and the grandson of two World War I veterans. Personally, I have been in harm's way. I have experienced the theatre of war.

I share this experience with members because I believe that what we do in this place and the effects of the decisions that we make are ultimately about people, people who live in our respective communities and people around the world.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the NDP fully supports the brave men and women of the Canadian Forces and the important work they are doing around the world. Let us not sink into a debate, a jingoistic ballyhoo, when it comes to the issues of war. It demeans Parliament, it demeans citizens and it demeans the women and men who have served and are serving in our forces today.

Tonight we are here to debate and vote on a motion to extend our commitment to the Afghanistan mission beyond 2007. As many have already stated, the timelines and the process that have been provided to debate such a serious motion are not adequate considering the costs and considering the lives that hang in the balance.

In January 2002 Canada made a major commitment to assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. We supported that. From August 2003 to December 2005, Canada's military commitment was largely based in the capital, Kabul, as part of the international assistance force, which had the aim of providing intelligence and security to allow for rebuilding and supporting the democratic process, something which eventually saw elections in the fall of 2005.

Canada ended this role in late 2005 and committed a battle group of about 2,000 personnel to Kandahar in early 2006. This is when things changed. The mission changed from being a UN-NATO mission to Canada then taking on the mission in the south under the American mission, Operation Enduring Freedom. It should be noted that the American Operation Enduring Freedom tactics have been to conduct aggressive search and destroy missions, aerial bombings and all-out offensives against alleged terrorist insurgents for the last four years with absolutely dismal results.

That is what we agreed to most recently take on: a role in the south of Afghanistan. It must be noted that it was the politicians who determined the mandate, not the soldiers.

When the government led by the member for LaSalle—Émard committed our forces to southern Afghanistan, it was on the assumption that NATO would be taking over from the U.S. led coalition in February 2006. It is now May 2006 and we still have no clear idea about when NATO is going to take over.

It has to be said that the reason for the delay of the Dutch and the British to join in the south stems from their concerns about the mission. Why? Because of the lack of clarity in the south, which has brought not more security but less.

It is imperative for us to recall that the NATO-UN mandated mission was not to go to war in the south, but rather to build security for ordinary Afghans through the backing of the Afghan police and military. That is what Canadians understood our forces were doing.

Government Orders

The Prime Minister has stated that a motion is needed to bring clarity to our role and our mandate. In the recent take note debate, our party asked some very specific questions on our role in Afghanistan. What is the military objective? What is the command structure? How long will it take to achieve these objectives? Those, among others, were some of our questions.

Sadly, these questions have not been answered with the clarity we need.

Let us take the question of military objectives for our troops. The government has stated many intentions, such as bringing democracy, fighting a war on terror, making Canada safer or allowing girls to attend school. These are laudable goals and they could and at some point should be arrived at, but for now it is not a military objective. It is not what is happening in Kandahar.

On the question of command structure, as I have already mentioned, there is no agreement in NATO about what the new mission will be. Even the British have stated that a search and kill combat role is incompatible with a peace support operation.

● (2130)

The question is, how can parliamentarians vote on extending the mission for two years when this mission lacks clarity? In fact, instead of signing up for two more years of a mission that lacks clarity, we should be urging the UN and NATO to look at a plan for real peace in the south, a plan that abandons the search and kill. That has failed.

We should be supporting the peace strengthening commission, which needs international support and has been championed by an Afghan Canadian. In fact, there will be no peace in Afghanistan unless a peace process is put together.

Finally, we must address the opportunity cost of the extension of this mission. In Darfur, the killing and the genocide in slow motion continue and we sit—and stand—silent. That is not good enough. That is not the Canadian way. We can, we should and we must do better.

There are over 30 countries already helping in Afghanistan. We are proud to help out in development and peace building there. If we are willing to continue to be there to build peace and shore up development, then surely we can answer the call to Darfur as well.

Citizens send us to this place to make responsible decisions. An extension of this mission as has been presented is not responsible and that is why it does not deserve our support.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could recognize a few things for the record and for everyone in the House. The fact is that we are having a debate here tonight, a debate that was agreed upon by unanimous consent, and ministers have undertaken to answer serious questions here. We are also having a vote. This was not done in the initial deployment under the previous government, which was a two year deployment.

The Prime Minister is trying to build democracy in this place and send a clear message to our troops. Does the member who just addressed the House realize the big picture that is going to confront all members of the House tomorrow? The headlines tomorrow will simply say that this House is either with our troops on this mission or

it is not with our troops on this mission. That is what our troops will see in Afghanistan. This is what the headlines will show. Does the member realize that he will be helping to send the wrong message to our troops and that it will not be good for morale?

The leader of the NDP is going to have to explain to the House why the NDP is opposed to fighting for equality rights for Afghan women. Why is the NDP opposed to fighting for the extension of the democratic franchise in Afghanistan? Last, why is the NDP opposed to fighting for public education for all Afghans?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I began my comments by saying that I did not want to engage in jingoistic ballyhoo and I will not do that at this point. I will, however, point out to the hon. member that we do not need to take lessons about gender equality from his party. We do not need to take lessons about peace and security and building peace from his party.

What we do need to do is address the real concerns, the real questions about the mission and about the fact that bringing democracy to Afghanistan is a goal, not a military objective.

The Conservatives have not answered our questions. They have not brought logical questions to us and therefore have not convinced me that we should vote otherwise.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the member opposite, I will answer with only 36 hours' notice and now six hours of debate in this place, when we do not know what the mandate is, how many troops are involved and what the cost is. We know with certainty that a two year mission is certainly not going to be that, because if we are talking about cutting and running today, then certainly it will be that in two years. What we are really talking about is 10 years.

Does the member not think, in order to be honest with our troops, in order to be honest with Canadians, that we should have a proper debate about what this engagement really means and what indeed our engagement in Afghanistan will cost at the end of the day? And what is the mandate and how many troops will it involve?

● (2135)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, those are all good questions. Furthermore, what we need to do is examine it in committee and bring in Canadians and experts to make sure this is a decision not made in haste. It is too important.

We deserve to bring this further than a six hour debate, to make sure that the resources are there and we are doing the right thing, and as I said before, to not be involved in what has been a failure in the south of Afghanistan. We need to work on something that is more constructive, that will build peace and not bring about more of the disaster that is occurring right now in the south of Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Ahuntsic, for a very short question.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government talks of democracy, but the Prime Minister said earlier in the House that, if the vote did not support his decision, he could care less, he would extend the mission for a year.

Government Orders

This government wants to go to Afghanistan to defend the rights of women. However, today, the Fédération des femmes du Québec sent a letter expressing its opposition to the war in Afghanistan.

It added that, if the Government of Canada tried to legitimize this intervention claiming that it is to protect women and children, it had to consider that the largest group of women in Quebec, in solidarity with Afghan women, opposed this military intervention and instead advocated investing in a civil society and increasing democratic development.

What is the truth? Why does this government want the extension? It should tell us why it wants to go to Afghanistan. Why does it want to extend the mission by two years?

What does the hon. member think of all that?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. All I can say to my colleague is that I do not know, but maybe someone else south of the border could tell us. This is not something that we as Canadians signed up for, it is not what we as Canadians understand to be our mission, and it is not what I as a member of Parliament representing my constituents will vote in favour of.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have talked a lot about soldiers tonight, but I think we should also recognize that the civilian defence employees have been playing a large role. Those who have been to Kabul want to go back to Kandahar as well.

We have forgotten the original reason why we went. We invoked article 5 of the NATO resolutions because one of our member countries was attacked. We have not finished the job yet. One of our colleagues mentioned that the soldiers are watching and asked what this is going to do for their morale. The Taliban are watching, the terrorists are watching and terrorists here in Canada are watching. How does he think our soldiers are going to pay for the lack of resolve—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I think what we have to consider is that what our mission initially was and what it is now are entirely different. That is what we have to illuminate for Canadians. The mission is not with the NATO and UN; it is with Operation Enduring Freedom. Canadians know that now. That is why they will know that we should not be supporting this motion and why the NDP will be voting against it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out some facts and set the record straight about the Liberal position on Afghanistan and our support for the Canadian Forces there.

For many years, humanitarian aid and development assistance were the main goals of the efforts by Canada and our government in Afghanistan following the civil war.

The Liberal Party took a 3-D approach to international operations: diplomacy, defence and development. This is an integrated, global approach to achieving our goals, whether in security and stabiliza-

tion, humanitarian aid, institution building or economic development.

That is why the Liberal government joined an international coalition and, in 2002, sent some 800 soldiers to the Kandahar region to help flush out the remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda members. In August 2005, the Canadian Forces returned to Kandahar and set up a provincial reconstruction team or PRT made up of 250 Canadian Forces members and representatives of CIDA, the RCMP and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The PRT's role is to strengthen the Afghan government's authority in Kandahar and the surrounding area and to help stabilize and rebuild the region. It has also helped monitor security, explain the Afghan national government's policies and priorities to local authorities and facilitate security reforms.

All these facts show the commitment of members on this side of the House to our brave Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. However, we are also committed to helping Afghanistan rebuild democratically. This commitment still holds.

This is the heart of the matter. But the Conservative government's motion has nothing to do with the heart of the matter I just described. The motion before us is just a political strategy that does no credit to the Conservative government.

In fact, the first question we should ask is this: Why did the government decide to propose this motion today when the Canadian Forces' mandate does not have to be reviewed until February 2007?

The second question we must ask is: why does the government not give all the information on this issue to opposition members? Other hon. members before me have already talked about this. For example, I learned today through the media that NATO has asked Canada to lead the international military mission in Afghanistan starting in 2008. Why did the Prime Minister not inform the House of Commons of this? This is something members must take into account when considering the motion before us this evening.

The Prime Minister has created a government that does not share the information it has, whatever its importance, with hon. members or the Canadian public. The culture of secrecy is growing under this government.

Hon. members, and the Canadians they represent, must ask a third question: will the government respect the result of the vote this evening? We are told this vote is urgent and it must be held. In the Netherlands, for example, an indepth debate was held and all the parliamentarians had a chance to speak. Here, in the Canadian House of Commons, we are given a maximum of six hours. Again, we notice a culture of ultra control and of secrecy.

I asked the Prime Minister these questions this afternoon and I have yet to get any answers.

Government Orders

Let it be clear: we, the Liberals on this side of the House stand in solidarity with our soldiers and the Canadian humanitarian workers in Afghanistan. We want to offer our condolences to the family, parents, friends and colleagues of Captain Goddard. However—I am sorry to say so—her death must not make us go off the course we have chosen.

The information the Prime Minister and his party are giving us is not sufficient or satisfactory. We demand answers. Canadians do not want political strategies from their government. They expect a well thought out, wise and logical approach.

• (2140)

It is the only worthwhile approach.

That is what will help our troops and the people of Afghanistan.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Edmonton Centre, for a short question.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we talked about family tonight and I would like to read just a very short letter I received from a family:

My brother called me last night from Afghanistan. He has reassured me that this current operation is well received by most Afghani civilians. Perhaps we can give this generation the opportunity to be rid of the constant threats...to live a more free lifestyle...I do support further deployments to this region based on what my brother has experienced and been able to share. If I can reach this understanding of the situation despite my obvious bias to my brother's safety, I do wish others with no emotional connection could realize its importance and the potential benefits to the Afghani people.

I ask my hon. colleague, why not?

• (2145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly my question. It is truly my colleague opposite who represents the government, and it is the responsibility of this government to explain to Canadians what the military must do and why they must do it. It is now their responsibility. That is why Canadians voted for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The honourable member for Chambly—Borduas may ask a very quick question.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do have a very quick question.

Given that knowledge is the foundation of democracy, we should have the opportunity to obtain information in order to make a decision.

I would ask my Liberal colleague, who just intervened, what is her understanding of the position of the Conservatives who refuse to allow the Standing Committee on National Defence to study the matter in order to advise this House?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague completely.

We would even have liked some amendments to this motion, one of which would have been to ask the government to submit regular reports not only to the House of Commons, but also to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development and the Standing Committee on National Defence.

I think that would be quite reasonable. That is what an accountable government would do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 9:47 p.m., pursuant to order made Tuesday, May 16, 2006, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Call in the members.

• (2220)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 9*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Bagnell
Baird	Batters
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clement
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cummins
Cuzner	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Doyle
Dykstra	Easter
Emerson	Epp
Eyking	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Folco	Galipeau
Gallant	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Graham	Grewal
Guarnieri	Guergis
Hanger	Harper
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Heam
Hiebert	Hill

Government Orders

Hinton
 Jaffer
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Lemieux
 Lunn
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Maloney
 Mark
 McGuire
 Menzies
 Miller
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Paradis
 Petit
 Prentice
 Rajotte
 Regan
 Richardson
 Rota
 Scheer
 Shipley
 Skelton
 Solberg
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Toews
 Trost
 Tweed
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Wappel
 Warkentin
 Williams
 Zed — 149

Ignatieff
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lee
 Lukiwski
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 Manning
 Mayes
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Merrifield
 Mills
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Pallister
 Peterson
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Redman
 Reid
 Ritz
 Savage
 Schellenberger
 Simms
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Tilson
 Tonks
 Turner
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Wallace
 Warawa
 Watson
 Yelich

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
 Angus
 Atamanenko
 Barbot
 Beaumier
 Bell (Vancouver Island North)
 Bellavance
 Bevilacqua
 Bigras
 Blaikie
 Bonsant
 Bouchard
 Brown (Oakville)
 Byrne
 Carrier
 Charlton
 Christopherson
 Comartin
 Crête
 Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)

André
 Asselin
 Bains
 Barnes
 Bélanger
 Bell (North Vancouver)
 Bennett
 Bevington
 Black
 Blais
 Boshcoff
 Bourgeois
 Brunelle
 Cardin
 Chamberlain
 Chow
 Coderre
 Comuzzi
 Crowder
 D'Amours

Davies
 Demers
 Dewar
 Dhalla
 Dosanjh
 Duceppe
 Fontana
 Fry
 Gaudet
 Godin
 Guimond
 Jennings
 Kadis
 Keeper
 Kotto
 Laframboise
 Lapierre
 Layton
 Lemay
 Lévesque
 Lussier
 Malhi
 Marleau
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 Ménard (Hochelaga)
 Merasty
 Mourani
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Nash
 Ouellet
 Pacetti
 Patry
 Picard
 Priddy
 Ratansi
 Roy
 Sauvageau
 Scarpaleggia
 Sgro
 Silva
 St-Cyr
 St. Amand
 Steckle
 Stronach
 Telegdi
 Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
 Valley
 Vincent
 Wasylcyia-Leis
 Wrzesnewskyj — 145

DeBellefeuille
 Deschamps
 Dhaliwal
 Dion
 Dryden
 Faillie
 Freeman
 Gagnon
 Gauthier
 Guay
 Holland
 Julian
 Karetak-Lindell
 Khan
 Laforest
 Lalonde
 Lavallée
 LeBlanc
 Lessard
 Loubier
 MacAulay
 Malo
 Marston
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Masse
 Matthews
 McDonough
 McTeague
 Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
 Minna
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Nadeau
 Neville
 Owen
 Paquette
 Perron
 Plamondon
 Proulx
 Rodriguez
 Russell
 Savoie
 Scott
 Siksay
 Simard
 St-Hilaire
 St. Denis
 Stoffer
 Szabo
 Temelkovski
 Volpe
 Wilson

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

It being 10:20 p.m., pursuant to order made on Friday, May 5, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow, May 18, at 9 a.m.

(The House adjourned at 10:20 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, May 17, 2006

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Sarnia Building Trades	
Mrs. Davidson	1483
Canadian Forces	
Mrs. Chamberlain	1483
Sister Annette Bellavance	
Mrs. Mourani	1483
Pay Equity	
Ms. Davies	1483
Afghanistan	
Mr. Richardson	1484
Poverty	
Mr. Lee	1484
Conservative Government	
Mr. Van Kesteren	1484
Seal Hunt	
Mr. Blais	1484
Honda Canada	
Ms. Guergis	1485
MusicFest Canada	
Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte)	1485
Government Appointments	
Mr. Kenney	1485
Child Care	
Ms. Savoie	1485
The Budget	
Mr. Temelkovski	1485
National Day Against Homophobia	
Mr. Ménard (Hochelaga)	1486
National Day Against Homophobia	
Mrs. Jennings	1486
Afghanistan	
Mr. Hawn	1486

ORAL QUESTIONS

Canadian Forces	
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1486
Mr. Harper	1486
The Environment	
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1487
Mr. Harper	1487
Government Accountability	
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1487
Mr. Harper	1487

National Defence	
Mr. Dion	1487
Mr. Harper	1487
Mr. Dion	1487
Mr. Harper	1487
The Environment	
Mr. Duceppe	1487
Mr. Harper	1487
Mr. Duceppe	1487
Mr. Harper	1488
Mr. Bigras	1488
Ms. Ambrose	1488
Mr. Bigras	1488
Ms. Ambrose	1488
Government Appointments	
Mr. Layton	1488
Mr. Harper	1488
Mr. Layton	1488
Mr. Harper	1488
International Aid	
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	1489
Ms. Verner	1489
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	1489
Ms. Verner	1489
Afghanistan	
Ms. Folco	1489
Mr. Harper	1489
Ms. Folco	1489
Mr. Harper	1489
Ms. Lalonde	1489
Mr. O'Connor	1489
Ms. Lalonde	1489
Mr. Harper	1489
Firearms Registry	
Mr. Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	1490
Mr. Day	1490
Mr. Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	1490
Mr. Day	1490
Softwood Lumber	
Mr. Boshcoff	1490
Mr. Emerson	1490
Mr. Boshcoff	1490
Mr. Emerson	1490
Mr. LeBlanc	1490
Mr. Emerson	1490
Mr. LeBlanc	1490
Mr. Emerson	1491
Firearms Registry	
Mr. Breitreuz	1491
Mr. Day	1491

The Environment

Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	1491
Ms. Ambrose	1491
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	1491
Ms. Ambrose	1491

Firearms Registry

Mr. Cotler	1492
Mr. Day	1492
Mr. Cotler	1492
Mr. Day	1492

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency

Mr. Savage	1492
Mr. MacKay	1492
Mr. Savage	1492
Mr. MacKay	1492

Correctional Officers

Mrs. Lavallée	1493
Mr. Baird	1493
Mrs. Lavallée	1493
Mr. Baird	1493

Pay Equity

Ms. Minna	1493
Mr. Baird	1493

Agriculture

Mr. Bezan	1493
Mr. Cannon	1493

Aboriginal Affairs

Ms. Crowder	1493
Mr. Clement	1493
Ms. Crowder	1493
Mr. Clement	1494

Presence in Gallery

The Speaker	1494
-------------------	------

Business of the House

Mr. Goodale	1494
Mr. Nicholson	1494

Point of Order**Oral Questions**

Mr. Bélanger	1494
Mr. Nicholson	1494
Mr. Lapierre	1495
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	1495
Ms. Ambrose	1495

Decorum

Mr. Szabo	1495
-----------------	------

Oral Questions

Mr. Angus	1495
Mr. Nicholson	1496
Mr. Lapierre	1496

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**Interparliamentary Delegations**

Mr. Kenney	1496
------------------	------

Committees of the House**Government Operations and Estimates**

Ms. Marleau	1496
-------------------	------

Public Accounts

Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	1496
----------------------------------	------

Canadian Heritage

Mr. Schellenberger	1496
--------------------------	------

Fisheries and Oceans

Mr. Keddy	1496
-----------------	------

Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act

Mr. Rodriguez	1496
Bill C-288. Introduction and first reading	1496
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1496

Indian Act

Mr. Pallister	1496
Bill C-289. Introduction and first reading	1496
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1497

Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act

Ms. Marleau	1497
Bill C-290. Introduction and first reading	1497
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1497

Criminal Code

Mr. Benoit	1497
Bill C-291. Introduction and first reading	1497
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1497

Kelowna Accord Implementation Act

Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	1497
Bill C-292. Introduction and first reading	1497
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1497

Development Assistance Accountability Act

Mr. McKay	1497
Bill C-293. Introduction and first reading	1497
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1497

Income Tax Act

Mr. Fitzpatrick	1497
Bill C-294. Introduction and first reading	1497
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1498

Canada Labour Code

Ms. Bell (Vancouver Island North)	1498
Bill C-295. Introduction and first reading	1498
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1498

Criminal Code

Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	1498
Bill C-296. Introduction and first reading	1498
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1498

National Colorectal Cancer Month Act	
Mr. Silva	1498
Bill C-297. Introduction and first reading	1498
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1498
Perfluorooctane Sulfonate Virtual Elimination Act	
Ms. Minna	1498
Bill C-298. Introduction and first reading	1498
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1498
Criminal Code	
Mr. Rajotte	1498
Bill C-299. Introduction and first reading	1498
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1498
Canadian Wheat Board Act	
Mr. Ritz	1498
Bill C-300. Introduction and first reading	1498
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1499
Criminal Code	
Mrs. Kadis	1499
Bill C-301. Introduction and first reading	1499
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1499
Pest Control Products Act	
Ms. Savoie	1499
Bill C-302. Introduction and first reading	1499
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1499
Early Learning and Child Care Act	
Ms. Savoie	1499
Bill C-303. Introduction and first reading	1499
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1499
National Strategy for the Treatment of Autism Act	
Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	1499
Bill C-304. Introduction and first reading	1499
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1499
Income Tax Act	
Mr. Watson	1499
Bill C-305. Introduction and first reading	1499
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1500
Canada Pension Plan	
Mr. Watson	1500
Bill C-306. Introduction and first reading	1500
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1500
Phthalate Control Act	
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	1500
Bill C-307. Introduction and first reading	1500
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1500

Petitions	
Sudan	
Mr. Silva	1500
Older Workers	
Ms. Picard	1500
Child Care	
Ms. Chow	1500
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	1500
Motions for Papers	
Mr. Lukiwski	1501

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada's Commitment in Afghanistan	
Mr. Harper	1501
Motion	1501
Mr. Szabo	1504
Mr. Layton	1504
Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	1504
Mr. Dion	1504
Ms. McDonough	1505
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1505
Mr. Nicholson	1507
Mr. Angus	1507
Mr. Casson	1508
Mr. Duceppe	1508
Mr. Cannon	1510
Mr. Bagnell	1511
Mr. Hill	1511
Mr. Layton	1512
Mr. Hill	1513
Mr. Szabo	1513
Mr. Ménard (Hochelaga)	1514
Ms. Black	1514
Mr. Hawn	1515
Mrs. Chamberlain	1516
Mr. Masse	1516
Mr. MacKay	1516
Mr. Ignatieff	1519
Mr. Angus	1519
Mr. Crête	1520
Mr. Sorenson	1520
Mr. Coderre	1521
Mr. Batters	1522
Mr. Bouchard	1522
Ms. Brown (Oakville)	1523
Mr. Kenney	1524
Mr. Atamanenko	1524
Mr. O'Connor	1525
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1527
Mr. Bouchard	1528
Ms. Black	1528
Mr. Khan	1529
Ms. Lalonde	1529
Mr. Blaney	1531
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	1531

Mr. Arthur	1531	Mr. Obhrai	1541
Ms. Davies	1532	Ms. Dhalla	1542
Ms. Verner	1532	Mr. Nadeau	1542
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	1533	Ms. Nash	1542
Mr. Ménard (Hochelaga)	1534	Ms. McDonough	1542
Mr. Menzies	1534	Mr. MacKay	1544
Mr. McGuire	1535	Ms. Sgro	1544
Mr. Bouchard	1535	Mr. Dewar	1545
Mr. Owen (Vancouver Quadra)	1536	Mr. Batters	1546
Mr. Abbott	1536	Mr. Holland	1546
Mr. Siksay	1537	Mrs. Mourani	1546
Mr. Cuzner	1537	Mrs. Gallant	1547
Mr. Casson	1538	Ms. Folco	1547
Mr. Blais	1538	Mr. Hawn	1548
Mr. Hiebert	1539	Mr. Lessard	1548
Mr. Silva	1540	Motion agreed to	1549

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