



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 141 • NUMBER 136 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 19, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 19, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)
[English]

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-428, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (methamphetamine).

He said: Mr. Speaker, in communities across this country methamphetamine, or crystal meth, is becoming an urgent problem. Our children and our communities are at risk.

Unlike other drugs, crystal meth does not need to be imported or grown, but can be synthesized using components that are readily available. Crystal meth is one of the most addictive and damaging of all street drugs and the tragic consequences of the lives that it affects are unacceptable.

The province of Alberta is a desirable haven for meth labs, as are other provinces with high agricultural sectors, since hydrous ammonia is readily available because of its fertilizer component for agricultural communities. Crystal meth is finding its way into rural communities such as my own because of this situation.

This private member's bill would amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to provide the police with more tools to deal with the growing problem of methamphetamines.

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

* * *

BANK ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-429, An Act to amend the Bank Act (automated banking machine charges).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce this bill that would amend the Bank Act to prohibit ATM fees. The bill would prohibit banks from charging their customers fees for transferring their money or account information through automated banking machines.

Canada's banks currently charge customers these fees for accessing their own money through the bank's own ATMs, other banks' ATMs and privately owned machines. These fees, in our view, are excessive and unnecessary, especially given the huge profits of these institutions, and they are fees that could be easily waived by the banks. This bill would give average Canadians a break on their basic banking charges.

I believe all Canadians would benefit from this change, particularly those on tight budgets. I urge all members to support this initiative.

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

* * *

•(1010)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-430, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (child pornography).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to table a bill to protect our children from the exploitation of child pornography.

Regrettably there has been a proliferation of pornography within our society over the past decades. More regrettable has been the proliferation of child pornography. Child pornography is real, it exists, and its presence in our society has been growing. It is truly a threat to our children and we as a society have tasted its bitter fruit.

Unfortunately, there is a loophole in our Criminal Code that allows child pornography. Paragraph 163.1(6) states:

No person shall be convicted of an offence under this section if the act as alleged to constitute the offence

(a) has a legitimate purpose related to the administration of justice or to science, medicine, education or art;....

Therein lies the loophole: the interpretation of the terms "education" and "art".

The bill I am tabling today seeks to remove these two terms and, in so doing, better protect our children and our society from the ravages of child pornography. I said that as an MP I would work to defend our families and our children and that is what I am doing by tabling this bill today.

Business of Supply

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

* * *

PETITIONS

INDUSTRY CANADA

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition today from constituents in my area, mainly in the Churchbridge and Langenburg area. The petitioners would like to draw the attention of the House of Commons to the fact that Industry Canada has provided funding for the production of a booklet called “The Little Black Book” that contains pornographically explicit material and that this booklet indoctrinates and solicits children to same sex relationships and may contain incomplete and inaccurate information. The booklet is being used in a provincial education system as a handout to students.

The petitioners therefore call on Parliament to rescind all funding to this project and such related or similar projects and remove all reference to endorsement of such materials by Industry Canada or other departments, review the impact of the Bill C-38 marriage law and its complicit tie to such promotion of same sex material, and take all necessary steps to ensure accountability of tax dollar expenditures on this project in every department.

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present petitions from thousands of ordinary Canadians from across Ontario. The petitioners say that the unification of seniors with their families in Canada through immigration is a core aspect of forming strong, healthy and vibrant families and communities in Canada; that newcomer seniors currently suffer unfairly from the 10 years' residency requirement under Canada's income security programs; and that Canada's old age security, guaranteed income supplement and social assistance programs are age, capacity and needs based benefit programs, not individual contribution based income security plans.

Therefore, the petitioners ask the Government of Canada to amend the Old Age Security Act regulations and policies to eliminate the 10 year residency requirement for old age security and guaranteed income supplement. The petitioners ask that the Government of Canada work with provincial governments to waive the enforcement of sponsorship obligations through government cost recovery schemes as a condition of financial support in situations of genuine immigration sponsorship breakdown involving a senior. Also, they ask that the government establish a nominal public transit charge for all seniors in Canada, similar to the nominal \$45 a year charged to seniors in British Columbia. Lastly, they ask that the Government of Canada provide government funding to support more ethno-specific affordable housing for seniors who need or desire it.

* * *

•(1015)

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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.) moved:

That,

(1) whereas all Members of this House, whatever their disagreements may be about the mission in Afghanistan, support the courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces;

(2) whereas in May 2006, the government extended Canada's military commitment in Southern Afghanistan to February 2009;

(3) whereas it is incumbent upon Canada to provide adequate notice to the other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of our intentions beyond that date;

(4) whereas by February 2009, Canada's military mission in Southern Afghanistan will represent one of the largest and longest military commitments in Canadian history; and

(5) whereas Canada's commitment to the reconstruction and security of Afghanistan is not limited to our combat operations in Southern Afghanistan;

this House call upon the government to confirm that Canada's existing military deployment in Afghanistan will continue until February 2009, at which time Canadian combat operations in Southern Afghanistan will conclude; and call upon the government to notify NATO of this decision immediately.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the hon. member for Bourassa, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 24, 2007.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, today we are here in Parliament, the cradle of democracy, to debate a motion on the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan that I have tabled in the House on behalf of the official opposition and as Liberal national defence critic. It is important to highlight the motion's first “whereas”.

Business of Supply

We are a government in waiting and in a strong position. Given that we were responsible for initiating this mission, we can speak with credibility about it. In no way is anyone on either side of this House calling into question the exceptional work of our courageous men and women. Unfortunately, we have now lost 54 soldiers. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. We must salute the courage of all of our troops.

I will be leading off the debate today, and I have the honour of sharing my time with the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

I have to explain the context of this motion. As I said, we initiated this mission—first in Kabul and then in Kandahar—and we are the only party that is in a position to take power after the next election. We would like to believe what the Prime Minister told us. He said that Parliament should consider what the future of this mission is to be after February 2009. The problem is that we do not believe this government and that we have an extremely weak Minister of National Defence who screws up on a daily basis. People who watch the news on television get the impression that he changes his mind as fast as he changes his shirt. In light of those contradictions, I think that our troops, their families and all Canadians have the right to know what is going on.

Our party is giving its unconditional support to this mission until February 2009. We know that our men and women are doing outstanding work. However, we think that greater emphasis should be put on development, that we have a diplomatic role to play and that if we take a piecemeal approach, as the government is doing, the mission is doomed to failure.

Originally, in the context of mission we took on, we wanted to take what is known as the 3D approach: development, diplomacy and defence. That would have helped us.

However, it is important that Canadians know what to expect, that they understand that this is an international mission and that we are working very closely with the NATO forces. Backed by a Security Council resolution, we decided to participate, in order to help the Afghan people see the light at the end of the tunnel. This is important. However, we do not believe this government. We are extremely concerned about how this government is behaving with respect to the mission in Afghanistan. Hiram Johnson, Governor of California in the early 20th century, had something interesting to say on this. He said:

• (1020)

[*English*]

“The first casualty when war comes is the truth”. We are bothered with the way the government is acting right now, the way that it is promoting the mission itself and the way it is making all those big announcements to buy equipment. It is buying equipment and spending billions of dollars for equipment that we are supposed to need for the mission. However, when we realize what is going on through the delivery date, the equipment will only be ready after February 2009. If we are supporting a mission and we want to provide that equipment, why do we bother to spend billions of dollars without any white paper, without any plan?

We are saying that because we are going to Afghanistan, we need tanks, helicopters and some other equipment but when we look at the delivery date, it seems the helicopters will be ready in 2010. It seems that those tanks, besides the ones that we are leasing, will be ready by the end of 2008.

We believe the mission is important and we believe our men and women should have the equipment they need. As a matter of fact, even General Hillier at that time, when we put forward that mission, was pretty clear. He said, “We have the best equipment and the government in place is providing us with what we need”. That was the Liberal government at that time. Therefore, we will need to find some other reason why we want to spend all that money on equipment.

We were announcing, as members will remember, in the restructuring plan to provide more equipment for the troops but we were doing it in a way where the process was a bit more transparent. We did not have a minister of national defence who was a former arms dealer. We did not have a minister of national defence who was a lobbyist promoting that equipment and who was in charge of the requirement to have that equipment for the troops.

[*Translation*]

Justice must be seen to be done. There can be no conflict of interest, or apparent conflict of interest.

The current problem is that the Minister of National Defence is so ineffectual that even the press is beginning to wonder how long he will remain the Minister of National Defence.

All the while, there is a mission going on in Afghanistan. Men and women are fighting for democracy, to free and support the Afghan people. However, we do not know exactly where we stand. Every time we turn on the television, listen to the radio or read the newspaper, we are given the impression that we could stay in Afghanistan for another 10 or 15 years. It also seems that, on any given day, we are told one thing one moment, and the exact opposite a moment later.

What we need in this file is clarity. We need a responsible government to send clear messages to international institutions. The Liberal Party of Canada supports a multilateral approach. Unlike the Prime Minister, who would have liked to see Canadians in Iraq, we decided to go to Afghanistan because of a Security Council resolution.

We worked with our NATO allies and took a multilateral approach. It was the international communities as a whole that decided that we had to settle the situation in Afghanistan. It corresponded to important Canadian values. In light of that, obviously it was essential to take part in the war. And we went ahead. Remember that our colleague—the former acting leader, member for Toronto, Minister of Defence and exceptional Minister of Foreign Affairs—made announcements at the time.

Other colleagues of ours also worked towards this end. It was always extremely respectful. We had the advantage of being clear; we gave a cut-off date. We said that it was not a Canadian mission, but that we would take part in it.

Business of Supply

There are so many contradictions. The current Minister of National Defence is a burden, because of his gaffes. He now says that we will need tanks. Not only does that add to the lack of clarity, but puts us on an extremely slippery field.

As for using tanks against guerilla warfare, most of the experts say that not only does it lead to stalemates and to escalation of the violence, but it is not necessary. Even the German army exchanged the caterpillar tracks on its tanks for wheels because it knows that, in order to protect the troops and play a development role, you do not arrive in villages with tanks, saying, "Welcome, I'm here, we love you". We knew that the LAV3s we had at the time, the armoured vehicles, were enough to protect our troops. We have to wonder: What do they want tanks for?

I know that my speaking time is limited, but it is important to mention that the goal of this mission is important. Although essential, this mission should also have a cut-off date. We will still be there as far as development and diplomacy are concerned. We can also play an advisory role, as we have always done. It is important to say that we do not want to end up in a situation like Bush in Iraq.

As far as tanks are concerned, General Hillier himself said:

• (1025)

[*English*]

"It was an albatross around our army's neck. Now that we are spending almost a billion dollars for those tanks, it is unnecessary".

[*Translation*]

Next week, I will be in Brussels. I will be accompanying the Minister of Foreign Affairs to a NATO forum. We will be talking about all these issues. However, I hope that the House will make the decision that reflects the wishes of the Canadian people, that is, to support the mission but to put an end to it in February 2009. I ask the House to vote in favour of this motion.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will disregard the personal and insulting comments about our excellent Minister of National Defence.

[*English*]

I would like to comment on a couple of things my hon. colleague said. There are so many things that it is hard to know where to start in terms of what was misinformation, what was misguided or what was simply irresponsible and unconscionable. I am sure as the day goes along we will probably elevate the level to things of that nature but for now I would like to point out a couple of inconsistencies.

When my hon. colleague talks about equipment for the mission, he is talking about C-17s, C-130Js, Chinook helicopters and so on. They are not just equipment for the mission in Afghanistan. They are equipment that Canada, Canadians and the people who rely on us around the world have been deprived of because of decades of Liberal neglect of the military.

All of the equipment for the floods in Manitoba, for the ice storms in Quebec and Ontario and for DART have been moved by U.S. Air Force C-17s or rented Russian airplanes. That is not the way a sovereign nation, which looks after its own people and its responsibilities abroad, handles its military affairs.

Does my hon. colleague see a use for C-17s, C-130Js and Chinooks beyond the mission in Afghanistan, or is he so blinded by the political games the Liberals are playing that he is not looking beyond 2009?

• (1030)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, the problem is that I did not say that every time an announcement is made it says that we need the equipment for the mission.

If the member wants to talk about sovereignty, why is the government spending \$3.4 billion and delivering a blank cheque to Boeing when the Canadian industry has no benefit from it? Instead of spending \$3.4 billion on the C-17s, they can be rented for \$42 million per year. I just completed my M.B.A. and when I look at the balance sheet, I believe that is a better move.

As for the Chinooks, the member knows why the money was spent on the Chinooks. Because of the climate in Afghanistan, those helicopters are needed. The Liberals believe in helicopters and we have said that since the beginning. If the House remembers, the member for LaSalle—Émard, the former prime minister, was putting together a plan for that purpose.

However, if the government's policy is to spend the money in the way that it is being spent without any bids and using it for things like the tanks for the mission and then sending tanks to Darfur, then I want to see its white paper because I think the government is being irresponsible.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since 2005, under the former Liberal government, Canadians have been fighting a growing insurgency in south Afghanistan. However, since then, OPM poppy production reached a record high last year, surpassing 2005's total of 49%.

In the first nine months of 2006, 3,700 people were killed in the conflict, already a fourfold increase over the year before, and there were 139 suicide attacks in 2006, up from 27 in 2005.

In five years, Afghanistan is still one of the world's poorest countries. One in four Afghan children do not live to the age of five and 70% of the Afghan population is malnourished.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of difficulty accepting the NDP's position because its solution is to abort the mission. What kind of credibility does it have?

It is possible to dislike how the mission is unfolding, but we believe that it is necessary. Stability and instruments of security are needed if we want to establish an environment conducive to development and one that will counter poverty and contribute to tackling the hellish drug problem. That is why the military operation is necessary.

However, we do not wish to do it piecemeal, as proposed by the government. We have the feeling that, from the beginning, the focus was on military operations because the military aspect is seven times greater than the development component.

Business of Supply

A military operation is necessary if we wish to have development, diplomacy and geopolitical stability. The NDP does not have any credibility. It believes that we should pull the plug on the mission immediately.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I want to join the hon. member for Bourassa and say that on behalf of the official opposition and the Liberal caucus—

[*English*]

I want to offer my sincere condolences to the family, friends and comrades of the soldier who died yesterday in Afghanistan.

• (1035)

I rise today on behalf of every Canadian to demand clarity and accountability from the Prime Minister and his Minister of National Defence.

Our soldiers in Afghanistan are performing a difficult mission under the most dangerous circumstances. Today we need to say that they honour our nation with their courage and I know I speak for every member in this House when I say that they have our full and unwavering support.

However, events in Afghanistan bring into focus another point, one which brings great concern to this House. We need to think about what is happening regarding the clarity of the government. Will the government level with the Canadian people about how long it plans to keep our combat forces in Kandahar?

A Liberal government will end Canada's combat role in Kandahar in February 2009 and we will immediately inform NATO of our position. We have not received such clarity from the Conservative government. Instead, we have heard only conflicting stories and ambiguities.

[*Translation*]

A Liberal government will end Canada's combat role in Kandahar in February 2009 and we will immediately inform NATO of our position.

We have not received such clarity from the Conservative government. Instead we have heard only conflicting stories and ambiguities. In February we learned that the Canadian Forces are preparing to extend their combat mission in Kandahar until at least 2011. A little later, the Minister of National Defence said that Canada would remain in Afghanistan until the progress in Afghanistan becomes irreversible. Later he said that Canada could withdraw in 2010, but only if certain conditions are met. These conditions oddly remind us of those President George W. Bush would impose before ending the war in Iraq, a war that our current Prime Minister would have liked to drag Canada into.

The Prime Minister refuses to accept that Canadians do not want an never-ending war. Under the current government, that is what the campaign in Afghanistan seems like. Now we learn that cabinet has not even discussed this issue and that it does not intend to do so before next year, at the earliest. As the hon. member for Bourassa said, the arms ordered by the Minister of National Defence for the Kandahar mission will not even be available before February 2009.

[*English*]

There are too many different answers to the same critical question: What is the government's plan for Canada's forces in Afghanistan? Canadians deserve a clear answer to this question.

Canadians expect our mission in Kandahar to end in February 2009, but this government has been deliberately ambiguous on this point. We owe Canadians, as well as our allies, clarity.

As long as our NATO allies believe Canada's commitment in Kandahar to be open-ended, they will never prepare for our departure.

By February 2009, Canada will have met its obligations to NATO in southern Afghanistan. We will have served the people of that country for seven years. We will have served them in a full combat role for three years, in the most dangerous part of the country. By then, it will have been one of the longest military combat roles we have ever played.

Unless the Government of Canada makes clear now to our allies our plans in Afghanistan, Canada will be put in an untenable situation by the end of our current mandate in February 2009.

The government must tell our allies now to begin planning for the assumption of this role in southern Afghanistan. We owe it to our soldiers to begin planning now for passing control and execution of this mission to others.

The Conservative government, by refusing to be clear about its military plans for Afghanistan, is taking our attention away from the larger debate: how we can succeed in bringing some measures of peace to that country.

Success in Afghanistan cannot be achieved by military means alone. The basic goal for Canada in Kandahar should be to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. We certainly do not win hearts and minds by telling the Afghans that we are in their country for reasons of retribution, as the defence minister recently stated.

For this House to be in the best position to debate how to play out the rest of the mission in Kandahar, we need clarity from the Prime Minister on when that mission will end.

I commit to the House today that a Liberal government will not extend Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan beyond February 2009. A Liberal government will immediately inform Canada's NATO allies of this decision.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

For this House to be in the best position to debate how to play out the rest of the mission in Kandahar, we need to have all the information.

And for that we need clarity from the Prime Minister on when the mission will end.

I commit to the House today that a Liberal government will not extend Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan beyond February 2009.

Business of Supply

A Liberal government will immediately inform Canada's NATO allies of this decision.

[English]

For the good of Afghanistan and for the good of Canada's troops, I call on the Prime Minister to match this commitment by supporting today's motion. I call on him to make clear to this House and to our allies that Canada will not continue its combat role in Afghanistan after the end of our current mission in February 2009.

[Translation]

For the good of Afghanistan and for the good of Canada's troops, I call on the Prime Minister to show the same commitment by supporting today's motion.

I call on him to make clear to this House and to our allies that Canada will not continue its combat role in Afghanistan beyond February 2009, as planned.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed and troubled by what I have heard and the motion tabled by the member for Bourassa.

I am disappointed to see the Liberals siding with the terrorists and the Taliban. I am disappointed to see them taking this untimely and irresponsible position. I am disappointed in the Liberals' lack of clarity. Our position on this matter is clear: we support the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

I am disappointed when the Leader of the Opposition says one thing and then does the exact opposite. A definite commitment is needed by Afghanistan, by NATO, by the United Nations and by the Canadian people to ensure its own security.

What about the credibility of those presenting this motion? What were they doing last summer under the Hezbollah flag with a machine gun? What is this proposal and how credible is it? I went to Afghanistan—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Bourassa on a point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, if the member for Lévis—Bellechasse wants to hold on to what little credibility he has, he should certainly not be questioning the integrity of the members of this House. No one is supporting the terrorists. Let us have a serious debate. If he wants to make personal attacks, he should know that we can do so too, it is not hard. It is easy to start, and we can be done with it.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to enforce a higher level of debate. I will not accept personal attacks being made on me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I thank the hon. member for Bourassa for his comments.

[English]

I would like to ask all members to be judicious in their comments.

I would also like to congratulate all members of the House who were attentive when the hon. member for Bourassa spoke and when the hon. Leader of the Opposition spoke. I would also appreciate that the same attention be given when other members of the House speak.

● (1045)

[Translation]

The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse should immediately get to his question, since there are only 20 seconds remaining.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, thank you for your remarks. I was only stating facts.

My question is for the Leader of the Opposition. What does he have to say to the Afghan people? To Afghan women? What does he have to say to Afghan girls who are denied the fundamental right to education? What does he say to our—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, one thing needs to be very clear. The first paragraph of this motion reads as follows:

(1) whereas all Members of this House, whatever their disagreements may be about the mission in Afghanistan, support the courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces;

I believe in this motion, and I believe that today's debate should take its tone from that first paragraph. That is why I categorically reject the member's remarks when he accuses people who do not share his views of supporting the terrorists. This is shameful. He should be ashamed of that statement.

As for the issue itself, I believe that the Afghan people, Canadian troops and the Canadian people will be better served by clarity than confusion. The Prime Minister wants to commit us to a mission without setting an end date for the combat mission. That date has never been set. Last May, in fact, he asked the House to extend the mission to 2009. If he wants the end date to remain open, then he should tell the Canadian people as much. He should state clearly, as President Bush has done in Iraq, that he intends to stay in Afghanistan until certain conditions are met. He should say so, but he should not have us believe that he wants to end the mission in February 2009, as we are clearly stating. I am calling for clarity. I have always believed in clarity.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Halifax has one minute for the question and then we will have one minute for the reply.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I totally agree with the Liberal leader's opening comments, which is to acknowledge the courage and the dedication of our troops. However, let me also say, given the amassing evidence that the current search and kill combat mission, the aggressive combat strategy, in Kandahar is utterly failing, that it is bringing more insecurity to the lives of ordinary Afghans.

It is very difficult to understand how the Liberal opposition that, when in government, dragged us into that ill-conceived mission could now argue for an extension by two more years of a mission that actually a majority of those members expressed serious reservations about, going back almost a year now.

Business of Supply

I would like to ask the Liberal leader this. How does he reconcile the increasing evidence that this is a failed mission, that the insecurity is growing, that the number of deaths among our troops and civilians is growing, with a proposal put before us now to extend the mission by two additional years?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member for Halifax about the necessity to show, despite the arguments, that we are trying to help the people of Afghanistan and play a good role. I respect her point of view. I still think we may do good things in the next two years.

Canada is committed until February 2009. The motion does not create this commitment. The commitment has been made, and Canada must honour it.

We are part of a coalition. We will be better players on the team to help the people of Afghanistan if we are clear about what we intend to do. That is my point and the point of the motion. I call on the NDP to agree with that.

I understand that the NDP thinks the mission of today is a failure and that we need to get out, but I still think Canada can do positive things over the next two years. This will be facilitated if we are clear and not ambiguous about how long we will have the combat mission.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale.

I, too, on behalf of the government, would like to offer condolences to the family and the friends of the soldier who died in Afghanistan yesterday. It saddens all of us to see this happen.

I rise to speak today to the motion, which states that the combat operations in south Afghanistan conclude in February 2009. This is a place for reasonable debate, but, to me, this is the worst form of cheap partisan politics the House has seen.

The member for Bourassa and the Liberal Party are jeopardizing the safety and the lives of our brave men and women who are risking their lives to bring hope and freedom to the people of Afghanistan.

We in the House know that it is not just Canadians who are watching this debate. It is not just Canadians who hear the date that has been put forward. That shows an incredible weakness, vulnerability and opportunity for the Taliban to declare victory. This is unacceptable to me.

I highlight the fact that the Government of Canada's commitment to the reconstruction and security of Afghanistan is not limited to southern Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is the single largest recipient of Canadian development assistance. Canada's contribution to the reconstruction and development of that country is improving the daily lives of many thousands of people. The efforts of our soldiers, diplomats and development specialists are bringing about positive change in a very challenging environment, and we are making real progress.

Let me share with the House some of the achievements to which our assistance has contributed.

Canada is among the top five donors of the Afghan reconstruction trust fund, a multilateral mechanism that contributes to regular salary payments to more than 270,000 civil servants, including 144,000 teachers. The Afghan government was especially proud that over 6 million children had returned to school by last month, compared to 5.4 million last year. Nearly 35% of that number is girls. This is a major accomplishment. By contrast, only 700,000 children were in school in 2001 and not one of those was a girl.

The Minister of International Cooperation and myself were in Afghanistan last week. We met with the education minister, a very eloquent man. I am sure some members of the House met with him when he was here less than a year ago. He could not say enough good things about the difference Canada had made in getting children back to school, in paying teachers' wages, in providing education for these teachers, who can in turn impart it to the children so those children can have hope of a better life.

Another solid building block that has exceeded our expectations is the micro-finance investment support facility for Afghanistan. I will refer to it as MISFA. As of February 28, over 325,000 Afghans, almost three-quarters of whom are women, have obtained small loans and savings services. Each month the program reaches an average of 10,000 new clients. Last week the minister and I met with a group of these women.

● (1050)

This is the hope that we impart to these women. Not all people will be entrepreneurs, but we met with a group of them who are. I spoke with one middle aged lady who had no hope at all under the Taliban. This lady is manufacturing suits and clothing. Her husband is now working for her as are 14 other members of her family. She is earning a living for her entire family through a microcredit loan that was provided to her with the support of the Canadian government.

Other women are making pottery, dishes, processing food, all kinds of small home-based industries that would never have started under the Taliban, that would have been unable to be financed unless countries like Canada and other donor countries had not stepped up and become involved in that process.

Through CIDA, the Government of Canada is also proud to be a trusted partner in the national solidarity program, which has been successful in Kandahar and elsewhere in the country. We have 16,000 community development councils, elected by the local village people, that make decisions as to what projects should be funded. Local councils decide where the money from CIDA and other donor countries will be spent.

Minister Zia, with whom we met, told us that not one of those projects, which had been decided by a local council, had been targeted by insurgents. This is the success that we need to provide the environment for these projects to flourish under. Minister Zia met us at one of these community development council meetings, which was about 40 kilometres outside of what we refer to as the wire.

Business of Supply

The Minister of International Cooperation and I travelled outside the wire where Canadians and civilians would not have dared travel a year or two years ago. We sat down with the local council and discussed what its projects were. This has to continue. This is the opportunity that we have provided.

Yes, it takes as military presence to provide the security for this kind of project to flourish under. Those projects bring water to new crops. This is the way we will solve the opium problem. There is irrigation water available, but until we fund the process to get it to these fields so they can grow alternative crops, we will be unsuccessful in getting rid of the opium crop.

Canada is supporting projects that are changing the lives of the people of Afghanistan. From helping UNICEF establish a maternal health clinic in Kandahar to funding projects that provide alternatives to poppy production across the country, Canada is making a difference in changing lives.

It is remarkable that the Liberal Party can stand up and talk about balancing aid to military involvement. Canada's military has been involved in some of the greatest conflicts of this century. As a nation, we believe the lives of people outside of our borders have value and fighting for democratic freedoms is worth it.

To the Liberals, the numbers of people helped through Canadian aid in Afghanistan are just that, numbers. They are unable to see that each of those numbers, each of those millions of little girls going to school, has a name, a face and a hope that there is better life than the one they have known. Canada is not helping numbers. We are helping real people who deserve no less than we do: shelter, food, water and the ability to provide for their families. Why do the Liberals believe the people of Afghanistan deserve to be abandoned?

• (1100)

Hon. Bill Graham (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a comment and a question. The hon. member started his comments by suggesting to members of this House and to the Canadian public that by having this debate we are somehow being disloyal to our troops and giving comfort to the Taliban.

I would suggest to him that if that logic takes place, we will never be able to ask in committee a question of the Chief of the Defence Staff as to whether or not the operational tempo of our troops is being stretched. We will never be able to ask a question of any of our operational leaders as to what the nature of the success of the mission is. It will always be hidden under the pretext that we are giving comfort to the enemy.

I would suggest to hon. members that as members of this democratic institution we will have lost this war today if we give to the Taliban the control as to what we can debate in this House of Commons. We should never allow ourselves to go there.

This motion recognizes the fact that our troops are often stretched in these missions. We have committed, as our leader said, for the longest period of time. It is a reasonable proposition for us to debate.

Here is what I would like to ask the hon. member to say from his departmental point of view. If we had the commander of the forces in the south in this House or before the committee, would he say that

CIDA is delivering the type of aid and the amount of aid necessary for them to conduct an anti-insurgency operation?

Our understanding is that we are not delivering the level of aid necessary to do that, and while we can say that there are some successes, those successes are not sufficient to allow us to win what is not a military war but an insurgency matter, which requires an approach of aid, of diplomacy, of governance and of winning the war against opium trafficking and corruption and all the other issues in the Afghan government.

If we do not have that coordinated approach, we will never succeed at this, because it is not a military operation. Our leader made that clear in his speech and that is the thrust—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify for the hon. member that I did not at any time suggest disloyalty. What I suggested is that this is playing partisan politics with people's lives, with our soldiers who are willing to place their lives on the line to help our neighbours in Afghanistan. I never suggested the word "disloyal", nor would I.

But I do want to clarify that if we suggested or made a decision in this House that we are going to withdraw our troops in February 2009, what message would that send to the Taliban? All the Taliban needs to do then is sit back and wait for us to leave.

What does that do to that woman I met in Kabul? What future does that leave for that woman? What future does that leave for the little boy that I met out in that field in Afghanistan who trusts those soldiers with his life? He came over and talked to us. He came over and held his hands out to us and said, "Ball". That little boy trusts our Canadian soldiers because our soldiers are there not only to protect them but to provide friendship to them.

We cannot abandon these people.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary speaks about the loyalty that we owe to our courageous troops and I would say the loyalty that we owe to the people of Afghanistan.

Would he not agree that since the beginning of the Kandahar mission neither the Liberals, who committed us to this Kandahar aggressive combat mission, nor the Conservatives, who carried it on and propose to carry it on even beyond 2009, failed to do the due diligence necessary? Would he not agree that they failed to do the due diligence necessary to ensure that we had a comprehensive strategy and that we would not be increasing the insecurity that is resulting in thousands and thousands of civilian deaths and is driving people into the arms of the Taliban?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, I owe the hon. member who spoke previously an answer to his question. I got a little caught up in my answer and I did not answer the question. Yes, the commander communicated to us directly that we are making a difference and that we are improving the lives of those Afghans that we are there to help. Can we do more? We can always do more, and we can do more on our own soil, but yes, we are helping.

Business of Supply

I believe that the loss of lives of the local Afghans is a very sad reality, but it is not because of a lack of focus. It is not because of a lack of effort on our behalf. It is because we are dealing with people who want to destroy the lives of the Afghan people.

• (1105)

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that we deeply mourn yesterday's loss of a dedicated soldier and a fine Canadian. A member of Canada's Special Operations Forces died yesterday due to injuries from an accident that occurred in Afghanistan.

This is a time of great sorrow for his family and friends. On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to extend my deepest condolences to them during this difficult time. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Canadians stand united in pride and gratitude behind our Canadian Forces. We honour their courage and commitment. Their sacrifice will not be forgotten.

We are here today debating this motion because the Liberal Party of Canada now sees fit to abandon the mission to which it originally committed our nation. It seems that even in opposition the Liberals are determined to continue their new leader's record of not getting the job done. Is that the legacy we want to have for our Afghanistan mission? That we did not get the job done?

Interestingly, the deputy leader of the opposition, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, has some different views. Let us look at what he has said about this mission just in the last several months. He said:

What I learned there is you cannot do development in Afghanistan unless you control the security situation. The schools and clinics you build by day are burned down by night unless you have the troops to secure the development gains that you have made.

Is the Liberal Party now committed to abandoning the children and patients even if we have not stabilized the security situation by 2009? The deputy leader said:

States like Canada cannot be safe if we let Afghanistan fail...and become a base for terrorist attacks.

Is the Liberal Party now committed to gambling that Afghanistan will not become a safe haven for terrorists again? The deputy leader 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...You ask us to do something hard and difficult and we can do it. We're doing it in Afghanistan. It's in the greatest tradition of our country and that's the kind of country we want.

Is the Liberal Party now committed to risking human rights and the great tradition of our country?

He went further. He wrapped the mission in his own party's flag just last summer when he said:

Liberals need to remember this is a Liberal mission. We're in Afghanistan because of the leadership of the two previous Liberal governments...We, as a party, cannot abandon what is right or what we believe for political convenience.

Finally, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party told us, "We should stay there until we get the job done...".

In 2009, are Canadians going to be saying that we did not get it done? We are talking about the future of a country. We are talking about the future of some 30 million people, people just like us, except that we have the good fortune of living in Canada.

At this time of year, while many Canadians are engrossed in NHL playoffs and tax returns, Afghans are overwhelmed by much more fundamental preoccupations. Will their daughters be safe as they go off to school today? Will their crops wither from the drought this year? Or can they really rest assured that the Taliban who scattered from their village months ago have no plans to return?

Human lives hang in the balance. The motion hastily put forward today, which asks this House to call upon the government to terminate the Canadian Forces operation in Afghanistan by February 2009, demands that we make a hugely important decision without sufficient information and analysis.

Certainly February 2009 is the current date to which we are held. It is the date that the members of this House supported. For that reason, it must be taken seriously.

However, any proposal for an extension or a termination of our military mission in Afghanistan beyond February 2009 must be analyzed with the highest level of scrutiny, with the utmost appreciation for the work that Canadians and our allies have invested thus far, and with heartfelt concern for the plight of the Afghan people.

Out of respect for the vote taken by parliamentarians in May 2006, I insist that we not rush to judgment here today.

• (1110)

We brought forward a motion to the House to extend the current Afghan mission to February 2009. The government has been clear that if it were to seek a further extension it would come to Parliament to do that, and that remains our position.

[*Translation*]

There is no doubt that this mission has come at a cost. Tragically, it has cost Canadian lives. The costs to Canada form a crucial part of the equation when we look at the viability of this mission for Canada in the years to come.

However, the costs are only one part of the equation. The men and women who are currently facing danger in Afghanistan are well aware of this.

[*English*]

They understand that when we evaluate this mission we also need to weigh the reasons for it and the potential to make a difference.

The reasons are straightforward. The government of Afghanistan has asked for our help. Our allies and partners are depending on our contributions. The mission has been authorized by the United Nations and is being led by NATO. And quite simply, the future stability of Afghanistan has a bearing on the security of the world and the security of Canada.

This mission is not just about help for the Afghans. It is about international peace and security.

Business of Supply

For example, as the Minister of National Defence highlighted in Montreal a few weeks ago: six million Afghan children, one-third of them girls, now go to school compared to 700,000 in 2001, all of whom were boys; 6,000 kilometres of roads have been built and repaired; 2,500 villages have electricity for the first time; and 80% of Afghans now have access to basic health care, compared to only 8% in 2001.

What if we took the Canadian Forces out of the equation?

The fact is that security is needed for development and reconstruction initiatives to move forward. Development and reconstruction need to continue if the people of Afghanistan are going to have faith in the ability of their democratically elected government to provide for them.

This mission is an integrated pan-Canadian effort. Not only that, but Canada's efforts fit into a larger multinational mission. We are in Afghanistan with 36 other countries. We are clearly not the only ones bearing the burden of this mission. In fact, Poland, Australia and the United States, among others, have just stepped up their contributions.

Thanks in part to the efforts of the Minister of National Defence, significant progress has been made in strengthening our collective efforts in southern Afghanistan. In fact, just last week the minister held a meeting with the defence ministers of the other countries working with us in southern Afghanistan. We are part of a multinational team, a team that is depending on us.

The motion that stands before us today, which aims to carve in stone a deadline of February 2009, would have an impact far greater than many realize. It would let down our allies and partners in this mission. Quite simply, we would be shirking our responsibility to provide international and, ultimately, Canadian security.

Not only do we have international partners depending on us, but even more importantly, we have Afghan lives on the line.

Setting a deadline for the Canadian Forces' withdrawal right now would send a clear and dangerous signal to the Taliban. For the sake of the Afghans, our mission cannot be measured simply by the number of years or months we have invested. That is not an indicator of success, but simply a mark on a calendar.

We should not impose artificial deadlines that ignore the facts about progress being made toward agreed development and security objectives. This mission is to be measured by the impact we are making and will continue to make for the people of Afghanistan and for the people of Canada.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

We cannot take today's motion lightly. The government will make an informed decision about this extremely important issue, based on extensive deliberations. We will also give Canadians and Parliament the opportunity to express their views on this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to address the remarks made by the parliamentary

secretary. It appears that he has not paid sufficient attention to the terms of this mission.

Loose talk has been engaged on the opposite side of the House to the effect that this side of the House wants to abandon Afghanistan, whereas clause 5 of this resolution makes it very clear that we imply, as any sensible person would imply, that Canada's commitment to reconstruction, to diplomatic engagement and even, let me add, to military contributions to security in Afghanistan might well continue after February 2009 under a Liberal government. The issue here is whether it involves indirect combat operations in southern Afghanistan. That is point number one.

A second point that needs to be emphasized is that the parliamentary secretary talks as if the deadline was imposed by this side of the House. I would remind the member that February 2009 was the date proposed by the government. We on this side of the House are simply saying that the deadline is a fixed deadline.

I will make another point. When this deadline was brought before the House in May 2006, this side of the House was given six hours to debate a matter fundamental to Canada's national security.

If the government brings back another motion to extend the mission, I would ask the parliamentary secretary to allow the Canadian people and this House to have the debate that the motion warrants, as opposed to the situation we had last time when the debate was basically not enough time to give Canada enough time to consider the matter in all its gravity.

Given that there were meetings with Canada's allies in Quebec last week, what discussions were held in Quebec about the future of the mission, the extension of the mission? Canadian citizens have a right to know what engagements the Government of Canada is making with respect to the future of the mission.

I wonder whether the parliamentary secretary could clarify what discussions are underway with our allies in respect to the extension of the mission.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the member say that the motion is clear as it implies. Right there is the evidence that there is not much clarity at all.

He talks about the frustration that he has experienced with this party. The reality is that our government was the first government to provide a vote on this mission. The Liberals, when they launched this mission, gave the army—

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Answer the question.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: I asked you to read the mission statement.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: This is important. I would like you to hear this because since you were not here at the time you might not know. The member's government gave the army 15 minutes' notice about the fact that they were going to Afghanistan. There was no debate in this House, not even for six hours, and no vote in this House. It was simply an announcement that was made off the cuff without any notice to anyone.

The fact that we have taken these steps—

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary has sufficient experience in the House to know that when he refers to other members of the House he should do it in the third person.

I now recognize the hon. member for Halifax for a question.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just listened to the Liberal member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore trash the debate that took place in this House when the government saw fit to extend the mission from 2007 to 2009. I listened to the Conservative member who said that any decision about launching such a mission or extending such a mission would require “the highest level of scrutiny”. He went on to say that it would require indepth analysis of the mission's success or current progress.

I must say that one is left to realize that there is not a whit of difference or a tiny beam of light between the Conservatives' position and the Liberals' position in how they have dealt with this mission.

How can the Liberal member who just spoke apply to this motion the highest level of scrutiny saying that we need to have a full evaluation before extending such a mission or terminating such a mission when his government utterly failed to do that when it extended this mission in May 2006 for two more years?

• (1120)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, suffice it to say that we have committed our troops to this mission. We will take the time that is necessary to address this issue and have a vote in the House of Commons as opposed to dealing with it in the haphazard manner that the opposition is trying to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois and I would also like to extend our condolences to all the families of the soldiers who died on Afghan soil.

I want to start as well by getting one thing out of the way for the Bloc Québécois. I must admit that we are totally fed up with being told every time we ask a question about the mandate of the mission that we do not support the mission or do not support the troops in the field. This is a totally Bush approach, so named because President Bush always says that whoever is not with him is against him.

I would like to remind my Conservative colleagues that this is a parliament. A parliament does not express a single point of view. The government is entitled to its point of view, but the opposition is too. The Liberals are entitled to their point of view, just as the Bloc Québécois and the NDP are. We are elected by people who send us here to represent them. It is only natural that we will not always have the same approach or look at issues from the same angle. The opposition and the Bloc Québécois are tired of hearing certain things. Every time we question the government, every time we introduce a motion or a bill that is not in line with government policy, they tell us that we do not support the troops. That is simply not true. We should show respect for all points of view in the House, try as much as possible to reach a consensus, and then decide the issue on a vote. That is what democracy is all about.

So we are a little fed up with constantly being told that we do not support the troops. We support them, and even with the motion

before us today, we will continue to support them. I would like to remind the government, though, that in politics it is the civilian authorities who decide what a country's armed forces will do. When that is not how it works, it is simply because it is not a democracy any more. The day we have 308 Conservative members here, we will be living in a dictatorship. It is not very hard to figure out and I hope things never come to that. That is why parliaments are responsible for dealing with these issues and why they are made up the way they are with a government and an opposition. We should respect the points of view expressed by all the parties in this Parliament.

I would like to quickly review a little history. First, people are wondering how it is that we have Canadian soldiers on Afghan soil. We have to recall the entire situation. This is important, because we need to keep repeating how this came about. It is not complicated; it came about in response to the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The American government reacted very strongly and the UN also reacted. The next day, or the day after, the UN declared that the American government had the right to defend itself. Also the next day, NATO, which is a military and political alliance, invoked, for the first time, Article Five of its constitution declaring an attack on one member to be an attack on them all.

From that point onward, the Liberal government of the day and the Bloc Québécois said that it was entirely legitimate, and most importantly legal, internationally, to send soldiers there. That is how it started, under American command, with Operation Enduring Freedom. People went to Afghanistan to oust the Taliban from power, to ensure that this could never happen again. There were in fact a lot of terrorist training camps, and that question had to be settled once and for all. Canada, like many other countries, said that we had to support the Americans there. We have no problem with this, unlike with what is happening in Iraq. We had a UN mandate and a NATO mandate, and so it was entirely legitimate for us to go there.

Operation Enduring Freedom began and the Americans decided that they had to stabilize the capital first, and so they stabilized Kabul. We helped them do that. We had troops there. As well, NATO was getting more and more involved. There were discussions among all of the allies, and everyone seemed to be saying that NATO should be the organization in charge of the entire operation. That is what started to happen. As soon as Kabul was stabilized, NATO began to take control, and after that it was decided to move backward around the compass, in terms of the cardinal points. To explain, the NATO forces started by stabilizing the north, and then NATO took control.

• (1125)

The west was stabilized, and then NATO took control. The south was stabilized, and then NATO took control. On July 1 of last year, NATO took total control of Afghanistan. Certainly the Americans are still there, but a sort of division of labour has occurred. However, everyone agrees that it is NATO that now holds the mandate. We are currently participating in a NATO operation. That is why Canadian troops are on Afghan soil.

Business of Supply

As for what has been going on in Kandahar since we have been there, there is a problem. A military operation has its limits, and the Conservative government has failed to understand this. It has placed too much emphasis on the military operation.

People say that the logic is simplistic when we talk about the 3D approach—the government's official policy: defence, diplomacy and development—and when we say we have 2,500 soldiers in the ground in Afghanistan.

For development, we have six people looking after CIDA's development projects. I do not want to hear anyone say this is false, because we were there and we were told this when I asked the question of how many people on the ground were assigned to CIDA and development programs.

For diplomacy and Foreign Affairs, we have six people as well.

I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that this mission is very unbalanced. Everything that is happening proves this to be true.

Consider the escalating military involvement. The minister said we would not be sending tanks over there. But then what happened? And it is not just tanks. More purchases are being justified every day. We have now bought \$21 billion worth of military equipment. These purchases are often justified by saying that it is for Afghanistan.

Consider the C-17 strategic lift aircraft. My colleagues have already talked about this. Before now, it cost about \$50 million or \$100 million to lease them. Now, they are costing us \$3.4 billion, and on top of that, the economic spinoffs were poorly orchestrated. Once again, Quebec has been victimized in terms of these contracts. Clearly, the military is ramping up.

First, we sent tanks. Then, oddly enough, after a meeting in Quebec City with the military personnel responsible for southern Afghanistan, including the Dutch, the minister stated that we would lease equipment from our German friends and buy it from our Dutch friends. The deal was probably made at that meeting. These discussions must have taken place in Quebec City. All of a sudden, the tanks are arriving, with a \$650 million price tag. All that taxpayers in Canada and Quebec have to do is pay the bill. There is no doubt that the military is ramping up.

The Pakistan issue is also a problem. When they say the situation has deteriorated, that means they are having problems catching the Taliban. As soon as things heat up, they take refuge in the Pakistan oasis. I call it that because when their fighters are tired out, the border is so porous that they can get into Pakistan easily. Neither the NATO troops nor the Canadian troops can follow them into Pakistani territory because that country is an ally in this war. Nevertheless, intentionally or otherwise, NATO troops have a very hard time controlling the border. Pakistan is therefore a huge problem.

Furthermore, we have seen no progress regarding poppy cultivation. This is a fundamental problem in Afghanistan. We have been hearing for months that this issue needs to be resolved. The government, however, prefers to bombard us with the importance of military force to drive out the Taliban. Meanwhile, the Taliban encourages poppy cultivation. They use it to fuel and finance their activities. Once again, a misunderstanding by Canada and its allies

on this matter suggests eradication or aerial spraying of chemicals to destroy the crops.

Then what? What do we say to the peasant who earns his meagre income from that? For it is not the peasant—the one who grows it—who profits most from it. It is the middleman who comes afterwards. So what do we say to that peasant? That we are sorry, but this afternoon, our dozens of tractors in his field are going to put an end to his poppies?

• (1130)

People have begun saying that, if we wanted to drive them into the arms of the Taliban, there was no better way to do it. The Taliban tell the people they are willing to protect them and pay them for their crops. This problem must be resolved, especially since it also causes corruption and finances the Taliban regime. The best way to solve it is definitely not eradication. We should instead be trying to find ways to use this crop to legitimately supply the pharmaceutical industry, for instance. The Senlis Council released an excellent study on this topic.

On the other hand, having attended NATO meetings, I know that there is a great deal of discussion between NATO and the European Union to determine whether, if a peasant's poppy field is replanted with potatoes or tomatoes, part of the crop can be sold on the European market. These are discussions between NATO and the European Union. That makes sense because if you replace poppies with tomatoes you may not be able to sell them because of the small domestic market, lack of money or the fact that it just is not profitable. If you sell five tomatoes at the market whereas you wish to sell five cases, it is impossible to get ahead financially. However, if the European Union and NATO become involved and share a part of their domestic markets, it can work.

There is also the matter of the caveats, or the rules of engagement. There have been significant problems in this regard among our allies. Canada has no caveats. Canadian troops patrol 24 hours a day and carry out all kinds of operations. To my great surprise, when I went to Faizabad in northern Afghanistan at the invitation of NATO, the German troops said to me, "Mr. Bachand, it is 8 o'clock, we must return to camp". I asked why we had to return to camp at 8. They replied that their parliament had given the order to return to camp at 8 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker, you will indicate how much time I have left as I do not wish to see you become impatient.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I must remind the member that it is not permitted to name a member of the House, not even yourself.

Mr. Claude Bachand: In that case, Mr. Speaker, I will rephrase my sentence.

The member for Saint-Jean went to the north of Afghanistan. At 8 o'clock, this poor member was told that we have to return to the camp. That was the caveat established by their parliament. At 8 o'clock, they have to return to base. I told myself that this did not make sense. How is it that Canadian soldiers do not have this caveat and all of our allies do? At present we are working very hard on this matter.

Business of Supply

I must agree that we have a great many problems with the Karzaï government. Mr. Karzaï is known as the mayor of Kabul, which means that the people do not see him having any authority outside Kabul. Therefore, it is very difficult to establish his authority. As one moves away from the capital, his authority continuously diminishes. It is the war lords and clan chiefs who decide what will happen. Some governors—probably many—it is a known fact, have been corrupted by the illegal trafficking. Even some members of the Afghan Parliament are known as influential members of the illegal drug trade. That causes a great many problems. Many civilians have been killed. In a military operation, seeing that the bombing takes place without distinction between civilians and the Taliban, that has certain consequences. The population rises up against that. They have the impression that they are facing an army of occupation and not a liberating army. They see an army that does not make enough distinction between civilians and the Taliban.

The matter of prisoners is a very important point. We called for the resignation of the minister on this point because he misled the House. And that is continuing. When our soldiers take prisoners they turn them over to the Afghan authorities. We have received reports from the American state department that clearly show that torture is a regular practice there. People have their toenails or fingernails pulled out, or their fingers cut off. Women there are sex slaves. They are thrown in with the prisoners and so are children. It is there in the report by the state department. Those are not the words of the member for Saint-Jean; it is the United States state department.

The Canadian soldiers who are involved in that are in grave danger. The minister is an accomplice to it. The Government of Canada could be brought before international tribunals; perhaps even before the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of War Crimes, to which we are a signatory. We could face charges. The Speaker of the House might also face charges. Indeed, responsibility for this situation could be extended to the entire Parliament. So, there are dangers. When the Bloc Québécois raises these kinds of issues, we are accused of not supporting our troops. As I said at the start of my remarks, what constantly irritates us is that every time we suggest the least amendment, we are accused of not supporting our troops.

I have been to Afghanistan twice and I have met with General Richards, the NATO commander. He said himself that if we do not change course and if we maintain the military approach, in six or seven months we will lose 70% of the population. People would rather side with the Taliban than with an army like that, especially in light of the abuses I have just described.

The Bloc has long been calling for a change in this mission. The numbers speak for themselves: \$1.8 billion has been invested in the military and \$300 million has been invested in development. Let us talk about development. Earlier, I talked about people and their responsibilities. They get Afghan companies to sign contracts, but there is no accountability. An individual is given \$100,000 to dig a well in a village. A year later, no one has checked to see if the well has been dug. What did they do with the money?

There are huge problems and it is time to come up with solutions. Instead of focussing on these problems, this government wants to buy more tanks and send more troops. That is a reflection of the Prime Minister's foreign policy. He sticks close to George W. Bush all the time and tells him we are behind him. The message to our

European allies is that we support the Americans, and that message is not well received.

• (1135)

This has happened many times. There was the war in Lebanon, and this Prime Minister has put forward many other policies that fly in the face of multilateralism, which Canada was long known for. Where did Canada's strength lie? First, in peacekeeping, and second, in its ability to find solutions. Canada had friends throughout Europe. Now, we attach ourselves to the Americans and take George Bush at his word when he says that we are either with him or against him. Canada has decided to be with the American president and, naturally, against those who are not. Of course, that is not how things really are, but I see the reluctance of the 27 NATO countries. Many say that they do not recognize Canada. We believe that Canada's multilateral approach is essentially good. But in the absence of that approach, problems arise. We become isolated and a virtual slave to the American government. Military contracts are a prime example. We are sending billions of dollars south of the border and demanding nothing. Yet we are the buyer, we are signing the cheque.

There is much to be done. Why not ask a senior UN official to coordinate everything? Why does the Prime Minister not do that? Why does he not call for an international conference? Is he afraid of antagonizing his American friends? He should call for an international conference with Iran and all the neighbouring countries, such as India and Pakistan. Diplomatic solutions—the third D—must also be found. We cannot just close our eyes and say that Pakistan is our ally and we should leave it alone, when it continually gives refuge to the Taliban.

We will therefore support the motion. We agreed to extend the mission to 2009, and the motion clearly states that military operations will continue until 2009. For a very long time, we have tried to tell this government that it should change the mandate of the mission, but it has not listened. Now we have the answer. We will carry on until February 2009, at which time military operations must end. The Bloc Québécois believes that this is a sound position. We will support this motion.

• (1140)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. I note that there is a great deal of interest on the part of members. We have 10 minutes available for questions and I would like to divide that time as fairly as possible.

[English]

All questioners should look at the Chair so that they are not embarrassed with being cut off in mid-sentence.

I recognize the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the remarks of the member for Saint-Jean, and found that it was only at the very end that he stated his position on the motion. I am also a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence, and he raised some interesting proposals, especially in terms of drugs. However, with the Bloc, we never know which way the wind is blowing. One debate, they are in favour; the next debate, they are against. At the end of his remarks, we learned that the Bloc intends to support this motion.

Yet, if this motion were adopted, would that not be clearly saying to the Taliban that they need only wait until the Canadians leave and after that it would be every man for himself? I was part of the mission in Southern Afghanistan that Mr. Bachand spoke about. The Afghans told us that if we left, they would have no more hope.

In the end, if this motion is adopted, are we not pushing the Afghan people into the arms of the Taliban terrorists?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I know that the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse is a new member of this House but he was present when I mentioned earlier that it is not permitted to name other members, or even yourself. Members must be identified by their riding.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean has the floor.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse is forgiven. He is a fine fellow and I cannot hold a little mistake like that against him.

His question is valid, but we have another two years before us. The military operation will not end tomorrow morning. We will see what happens in 2009. For now, we support this motion because we have often tried to persuade the government that it is going in the wrong direction, that there has been an escalation of military activity and that everyone agrees that is not what we should be doing. Despite that, the signal that the government has been sending is that they are plowing ahead.

We have therefore decided that it is time to act. We are telling the public that it will end in February 2009 and we will withdraw from combat operations. That is what the motion says. It does not say that we will stop development and reconstruction. It does not say that we can not go elsewhere in Afghanistan. The motion before us leaves open many options, but in our view, it means an end to a strictly military approach.

I do not believe that this will have an effect on the Taliban because other avenues are proposed, such as international conferences or the presence of a senior UN representative. We want to resolve the problem in the most peaceful way possible instead of relying on a military solution.

[*English*]

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member's opinion on what exactly Canadians have brought to the Afghan people. As far as I can see it is instability. Under the previous U.S. backed Taliban there may have been oppression, but people did not fear for their lives every single day because of suicide bombers.

I listened to the parliamentary secretary talk about the hospitals and schools that have been built. He has neglected to talk about the hospitals and schools that have been bombed by the Taliban.

According to the *New York Times*, it is the Netherlands that is building this trust. It is the Netherlands that is building the schools. It is the Netherlands that is building mosques and hospitals. The Netherlands is building up a relationship with the Afghan people.

I understand there is a necessity to suppress the terrorists. However, I believe that as Canadians it is our role to be there along with the Netherlands, not securing a pathway for an oil line to go through Afghanistan.

This war cannot be won with weapons. It can be won only through understanding.

I do not thump my religion much, but I do recall that we are supposed to turn our swords into ploughshares. If anyone thinks that is a mockery, then let us take it all or take none of it.

•(1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I agree with much of what my colleague said. And I can prove it.

The members of the Standing Committee on National Defence went to southern Afghanistan, to Kandahar. For several days, I asked to see clinics and hospitals and schools. We were always told that for security reasons we could not leave the base. We had to rely on the journalists and our own heated protests to get out.

When we did get out, we were taken to the Afghan army training centre, which was very interesting, and the Afghan police training centre. But that is not what we wanted to see. We would have liked to see whether development was happening. Personally, I have doubts. We are always being told that it is wonderful, that everyone has gone back to school, but a lot of other groups are giving us information and telling us that this is not what is happening, that there are no schools. The girls who were in school a few years ago are now at home, because there may be Taliban who take a dim view of them going to school.

We therefore think that it is time to focus on development and reconstruction. As was said, we will finish the job, to meet our international commitments, in February 2009. Clearly, we will cease military combat in February 2009, and I hope that we will work on reconstruction and development.

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the insurgency, the security problems and the conflict in Afghanistan are all getting worse and the lives of regular Afghans are not improving.

We know that Afghan women are still subject to arbitrary imprisonment, rape, torture and forced marriage. This is why in August last year the NDP asked that the present mission end. Instead of destruction there should be construction. Instead of search and kill there should be mediation to bring insurgents into reconciliation.

Business of Supply

Canadians should be assisting in empowering the local organizations and government instead of top down solutions. Rather than relying on old Soviet landmines for protection, Canadians should be removing the landmines. Instead of spending \$2.5 billion so far on combat, Canada should be spending it on development aid.

Now is the time to end the combat mission and change it to a peace mission. Surely the hon. member is not going to join the Conservatives and the Liberals in voting to continue this losing war for two more years, especially when Quebec men and women will be sent to Kandahar this summer and will be in harm's way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I do not think anyone in this House will be surprised if I say that I believe in a sovereign Quebec. I always try to put myself in the situation of a sovereign Quebec. What would we do in this situation?

When we make a commitment to the international community and that commitment is to expire on a specific date, then it is somewhat difficult to tell that community that we have changed our mind and we no longer want to be there.

I therefore agree to a large extent with what my colleague is saying, but I also agree that we should honour our commitments to NATO and the international community and that we should therefore complete the military mandate in February 2009.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too am on the defence committee as the chair. We were in Afghanistan at the end of January and we were briefed by a number of people, General Richards being one. His comments about the contribution of Canada to that mission were exemplary. There were no bounds to his praise for our troops. It was quite refreshing to hear.

There were two people we met who really impressed me. The first was a soldier who disarms improvised explosive devices. He was quite an impressive young man. The other one was a warrant officer who sits down with the shura councils. When we talk about winning the hearts and minds of Afghanistan civilians, that is where we need to start. That is where emphasis needs to be placed and we are doing that.

I would like a comment from the member opposite about the efforts we are putting into dealing with shura councils.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, the chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence has brought up a valuable initiative.

If we devoted our energy to being more diplomatic, to consulting the *jirga* groups, the elders, the women's groups, to try to understand and propose projects that they will embrace, we would be on the right track. Unfortunately, we keep on hearing that for months, this is not what has been happening. There are military operations like Medusa and Baaz Tsuka. There should be more operations like the ones the Minister of National Defence has proposed. That has not been done, and that is why we support this motion today.

[*English*]

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

The NDP supports our troops. The NDP joins with all members of Parliament and all Canadians in expressing our condolences for the lives lost, including the tragic loss of life yesterday. We extend our condolences, wishes and prayers to the families and comrades of those who have fallen.

Our young men and women are losing their lives in a mission that is both failing and futile. How many more lives are we going to lose before the parties in this place come to their senses?

The NDP opposes this motion. Why? Because it prolongs a George Bush style combat mission in Afghanistan. The Liberals and their flip-flopping leader do not seem to understand the critical issues that are facing this country in this situation. A year ago the Liberals voted both for and against the motion to extend the mission. The now deputy leader of the Liberal Party voted for and the now defence critic voted against. Today with this motion the Liberals are endorsing the two year extension of the mission and the Prime Minister's game plan for Afghanistan.

By contrast, a year ago the NDP opposed the proposed extension of the mission. Had the Liberals listened to the NDP at the time, we would be following a path of reconstruction, aid and redevelopment now, not the current path of counter-insurgency and combat. The Liberals now claim to agree with the NDP that the current mission is wrong, and if they do agree, then why wait two years to begin the withdrawal of our soldiers?

The record is clear. The Liberals took us into this mission when it was called Operation Enduring Freedom and was directed directly from the White House. They never consulted with Canadians; they never consulted with Parliament.

The things wrong with this mission will continue to be wrong for the next two years and it will only get worse: a seek and kill counter-insurgency; imbalance between military and humanitarian aid spending; deteriorating humanitarian conditions. Why continue to prolong this flawed mission?

[*Translation*]

It is not responsible to prolong this mission. This is not a demonstration of leadership. It is a lack of respect for the women and men in uniform. These men and these women in the armed forces are putting their lives in danger daily in Afghanistan. They deserve to know that the members are thinking seriously about the mission in which they are engaged.

Our troops need to feel confident about the mission. They need to know that military deployments will take place at the right time and for the right reasons. They also need to know that military strategy will be reviewed and reconsidered if it is not the right one for getting the job done.

Business of Supply

[English]

When a party comes to the conclusion that a mission is wrong, then it cannot in good conscience tell our soldiers to continue in that mission for another two years. It must bring the troops home at the first opportunity.

It is important to support our troops in every way to ensure that the mission is appropriate, that there is decent pay, that there is support throughout their lives as we have done with our veterans first motion.

The NDP position on the combat mission in Afghanistan is very clear. It is a Bush style counter-insurgency mission not leading to lasting peace and better living conditions. It is unbalanced and overwhelmingly focused on aggressive counter-insurgency. The humanitarian situation is simply not improving and the effort cannot be won militarily.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Canada must demonstrate leadership and try to find practical solutions.

The safe and resolute withdrawal of our troops, in consultation with our allies, is now necessary. At the same time, we must now make a concentrated effort to develop a new approach as to the role of Canada in Afghanistan.

That begins by opening up a dialogue with the countries that are committed to helping the people of Afghanistan. We must work together in order to establish peace, development and justice.

Our approach must respect and involve the organizations, groups and governments at the local level in Afghanistan.

Canada must draw on its experience to ensure the diplomacy, aid and reconstruction that Canadians and Quebeckers want to see in Afghanistan. This should begin with a ceasefire as soon as possible.

[English]

Showing leadership in Afghanistan means working for peace negotiations. Chris Alexander, Canada's former ambassador to Afghanistan and now a leading UN official in Afghanistan, said that the absence of a peace deal in Afghanistan is fuelling the conflict. Gordon Smith, former senior Canadian diplomat and head of the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria, called on the international community to undertake serious efforts at inclusive and comprehensive peace negotiations. This is what Canada must be doing, but as long as we are engaged in the offence in the south, this will not be possible.

In an effort to try to find common ground, let me propose the following amendment to determine whether or not the House would be willing to take the appropriate actions. The amendment would read as follows: "That the motion be amended by deleting the words after 'operations in southern Afghanistan' in the preamble and replacing them with the following: 'This House call on the government to begin now to withdraw Canadian Forces in a safe and secure manner from the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan and call upon the government to notify NATO of this decision immediately'".

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before I recognize the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills, I will ask that we suspend for moment.

The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has proposed an amendment. I do not know whether he has received the consent of the mover of the original motion. I am going to take the amendment under advisement for the moment and report back to the House later.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this motion before the House.

I was listening to the member for Toronto—Danforth give his opinion on the motion before the House. While the New Democrats may disagree with this mission and how this mission is being executed and they may wish to propose new approaches to the mission in Afghanistan, there is no doubt about what the approach should not be, and that is for the proposed unilateral withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan.

The Canadian military needs to be in Afghanistan because we have national interests to be served there. If we were to withdraw our troops completely from Afghanistan, if the Dutch, the Americans, the British, and all the other multinational forces over there were to completely withdraw from Afghanistan, tomorrow the Karzai government would fall. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan would cease to exist, the government would fall and the Taliban would be back in power tomorrow. That would be the consequence of a unilateral withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan.

Let me remind everyone why we are there. We are there because prior to 2001 the Taliban government acted as a breeding ground for all sorts of radical elements that later launched attacks on targets throughout economies and societies in North America and Europe. That is the reason we are there.

A complete withdrawal is not good foreign policy and not something that we should be supporting in this House.

• (1200)

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I do not doubt the sincerity of the member's comments.

The consequences of the current approach that the Canadian government is taking, along with the Americans, is to increase support for the Taliban. Where we see reduced support for the Taliban is where the Taliban is being made increasingly irrelevant because of an approach that focuses on a completely different strategy: building support, building the country and building democratic institutions. Other nations, who want like Canadians to assist the people of Afghanistan and the government of Afghanistan, are adopting these different approaches with far more success.

Unfortunately, with the strategy Canada is using now, we cannot effectively participate in that alternative path. Worse, we cannot use our own inherent and globally recognized skills at peacemaking, at developing negotiation and mediation, and at bringing sides together, because we are so heavily involved on one particular side in the conflict.

Business of Supply

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Toronto—Danforth mentioned Chris Alexander, and I think we should share all of Chris Alexander's comments. Before the House standing committee Mr. Alexander said:

—Afghanistan would be plunged back into civil war [if Canada chose to cut and run]. The investment and achievements of the past five years—institutional achievements, electoral achievements, development achievements—would go up in smoke, almost certainly. NATO would fail in its top mission, and the credibility of NATO would be critically damaged. The United Nations would fail in one of its principal missions in the world, and its credibility would be damaged, with all attendant consequences for the future ability of the United Nations to influence affairs in the world.

If the member for Toronto—Danforth would like to reference Chris Alexander, he should heed his advice.

I would suggest that if we did cut and run in Afghanistan, we would be turning the clock back on the many incredible achievements that have been made there, whether it is the 10 million people who voted, the 2,500 villages that have had electricity, or the 190,000 landmines that have been decommissioned. Certainly, we should listen to the people that we quote.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, the member has chosen to quote that famous phrase “cut and run”, the accusation thrown at anyone who would challenge the politics of George Bush. In fact, it is a label that is constantly applied to those who believe that an approach based on the building of peace negotiations and with less of a military focus would be the best path to follow. I just do not subscribe to that view.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to express my condolences and sympathies and those of my party to family and friends of the soldier who lost his life yesterday in Afghanistan, and to the 53 other soldiers and their families whose lives have been lost and also one Canadian diplomat.

As I prepared this morning for this debate today I re-read the comments that I made last May 17 when the House was considering the extension of this flawed mission in Kandahar. The New Democratic Party voted against the extension of that mission.

I said then that any time we put the lives of Canadians in harm's way, we have a duty to determine clearly a number of points and those were: is this mission really necessary; is it a mission that can succeed, has it a good chance of success; and are we doing everything possible to ensure the safety and the well-being of our soldiers?

I speak again today as the defence critic of the New Democratic Party but also as a mother of three sons, as a grandmother and as a Canadian citizen. Two of my sons put themselves at risk every day in our country as police officers in one of Canada's largest cities. I understand the pride and I also understand the unease and the fear that family members feel when the government puts our Canadian soldiers into harm's way.

These people are performing the duties that we as a government and a country have asked them to perform. The concerns I raised then about the misguided counterinsurgency mission are even more valid today. Neither the previous Liberal government which took us

into this mission under Operation Enduring Freedom, nor the Conservative government which has extended the counterinsurgency mission have done their due diligence.

All Canadians have a right to expect that before our soldiers are sent on a dangerous mission that due diligence has taken place, that we understand the situation clearly in which we are placing them.

The situation in Afghanistan is incredibly complex. The threats go far beyond the Taliban. The forces of the warlords who are still in control of militias in Afghanistan, the criminal elements there, the porous border with Pakistan, the fact that insurgents can go back and forth across the border with impunity, the criminal elements involved in the poppy production in Afghanistan, all contribute to the negative security environment.

The Canadian Forces are stretched now. Soldiers are now serving up to nine month rotations and multiple tours in Afghanistan. When the Minister of National Defence assumed his responsibilities last year, he was briefed that the Canadian Forces then had the capacity to deploy a second land taskforce of 1,200 personnel. Now the minister says there is no such capacity.

The government needs to clearly show Canadians that the Canadian Forces can respond to any needs that may happen domestically here in Canada while this mission is draining our capacity.

The 2010 Olympics will be in Vancouver soon. There are security needs there. The minister has been briefed on those as well for the Canadian Forces. We could have floods at any time in Canada where the men and women of the Canadian Forces are needed to help at home and with ice storms in Quebec as we have seen before.

We have seen a very real escalation of this counterinsurgency mission in Afghanistan in the past year. The government has purchased 100 new tanks. Contingency plans are in place for sending CF-18s. We have seen plans by National Defence for rotations until 2011. Over and over again I have pleaded with the government to address the inadequacy of the detainee transfer agreement with Afghanistan.

• (1205)

I have asked the minister and the Prime Minister over and over again to correct it, and over and over again the minister has denied that there is any problem with the detainee transfer agreement. Now, what are we faced with? Four separate investigations about detainee transfers and still the government refuses to amend this agreement. It still maintains there is nothing wrong with it, even though the minister had to stand in the House and apologize to Canadians for misleading them about the role of the International Red Cross in that agreement.

One of the main problems is that no criteria for success has ever been laid out by the previous Liberal government or by the Conservative government for what would be deemed to be success in Afghanistan. The reality is that young Canadian soldiers are being killed and wounded with greater and greater frequency in a combat mission that is both failing and futile.

Business of Supply

How many more casualties must we suffer before the government comes to its senses? The number of insurgents killed or the number of foreign soldiers deployed are not signs of progress. Progress can only be measured by tangible results for the people of Afghanistan: the delivery of clean water, electricity, peace and security, and improvements in the quality of life of Afghans, not more uncertainty, not more tanks rolling down the hills of Afghanistan.

That is why the leader of the NDP has proposed an amendment that would begin the withdrawal of Canadians from this counter-insurgency mission as soon as possible. We need to look at a new approach and we need to look at that new approach immediately. We need practical solutions, so that Canada can take a leadership role in working for peace in Afghanistan.

We need to work in collaboration with other countries in the world to bring development, to bring justice to Afghanistan. We must use our background and skills. We have an incredibly well trained and educated military in Canada. We must use those skills and our background as Canadians to bring diplomacy and peace negotiations that would ensure lasting security and peace for the people of Afghanistan.

This is the only smart way to proceed. Every time we go out and the ISAF mission goes out and kills another young Afghan, we create more sympathy for the Taliban and more insurgents coming forward.

I said earlier that I have considered this motion as a member of Parliament, as a Canadian citizen, as a mother and as a grandmother. I want to remind everyone in the House that we are talking about the lives of real people. We are talking about Canadian lives and we are talking about Afghan lives. This counterinsurgency mission is not a mission that I can support or that my party can support. We will be voting in opposition to this motion.

● (1210)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before we go on to questions and comments, it is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion or, if he or she is not present, consent may be given or denied by the House leader, deputy House leader, the whip or the deputy whip of the sponsor's party.

The amendment is in order, so we will have to seek consent from either the mover of the motion or the whip of the party. I see the chief opposition whip rising.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that the leader of the NDP would propose this without even walking around or indeed, giving us a heads up that he was going to do this. We will not support this amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Since there is no consent, the amendment cannot be moved at this time pursuant to Standing Order 85.

[*Translation*]

We now go to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the presentation by the member from British

Columbia with whom I sit on the Standing Committee on National Defence. I have a question for her.

According to a report by Human Rights Watch, there have been 48 attacks by insurgents in Afghanistan. In her speech, the member talked to us about her fondness for our military, and she also spoke to us as a mother and a grandmother.

I have a list here of what the Taliban require of women and impose on them: they cannot work outside the home or study at university; they are stoned for extramarital relations. The list includes 30 criteria.

How does she see the future of Afghanistan without the support of the United Nations, NATO and Canada? Also, what does she think of the 200 attacks against schools in 2006?

Right now, the Canadian presence in Afghanistan is keeping schools open so that the Afghan people, Afghan boys and girls, can get an education.

I would like to hear the comments of the member from British Columbia about this.

● (1215)

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right, we travelled together to Kandahar and we were at the Kandahar airfield where we had the opportunity to meet and have discussions with the men and women of the Canadian Forces.

I remember one soldier who was part of the group that did the supply lines. He talked to me and said that he was anxious to get home. When I first met him, I did not think he would talk to me because he had an appearance about him of being kind of tough and standoffish. However, as he began to talk he had a real impact on me when he said that he just wanted to go home. He said that he had seen and done things in Afghanistan that he never thought possible and that he just wanted to go home.

In saying that, I am not insinuating that the men and women who are serving in Afghanistan do not take their work and their duty seriously. I want to make the distinction that it is the government that chooses where it sends the Canadian Forces and that the Canadian Forces go where they are sent willingly. However, the impact that man had on me and the depth of his feelings I carry with me today.

In terms of the kinds of success that we would all like to see, and I acknowledge that the government also wants to see success, it is in exactly the way that the member is talking about. Our belief is that we can come to that success in a different way. Away from this counter-insurgency mission and away from the search and destroy kind of focus of this mission is the way to go in building a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, while hon. members in the New Democratic Party may disagree with the nature of the mission, with the operational details, with the nature of Operation Archer and with the details of how things are getting executed in the field in Afghanistan, there is no doubt what their response should not be. It should not be for the complete withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, which is what the NDP has proposed and what the Leader of the Opposition proposed in November last year, although with the caveat that he would consult with other members of NATO.

The withdrawal of our troops in Afghanistan is not what should happen. If that were to happen, if the Dutch, the British, the Americans, the Germans, all members in the multinational force, were to completely withdraw their troops from Afghanistan, as proposed by the New Democratic Party, the Karzai government would collapse tomorrow, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan would collapse tomorrow and in its place we would have a government that would not be favourable to Canada's interests, a government much like the Taliban that was in there prior to 2001, a government that would act as a safe harbour for radical elements that would later come back to attack targets throughout the world and attack innocent civilians. That is why the proposal that is in front of the House and the proposal of the New Democratic Party should not be entertained.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party is totally capable of articulating our own policy. The member has it wrong. We have said that we should withdraw from this counter-insurgency mission. We have never said that we would abandon the people of Afghanistan in any way, shape or form. In fact, we think there are better ways to do things in Afghanistan to build real peace and real security for the people of Afghanistan.

I would just quote a comment made by Winston Churchill many years ago. When we talk about diplomacy and the need for diplomacy, Winston Churchill said, "To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war".

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Churchill.

I would like to first offer my sincere condolences to the family of the young soldier we lost on Wednesday. Our hearts and our prayers go out to them as they go out to all the families of the young men and women whose lives have been lost in the long struggle.

It has not been a quiet year since the government voted to extend our commitment in Afghanistan. It was a vote that, as we all know, the government did not see as important enough to debate to its full extent because at that time no one had any illusions on what the vote was really about. It was meant as a cheap, partisan ploy, a way to suggest to Canadians that the Liberal Party was somehow soft on the Taliban, on terrorism and on a whole range of challenges to freedom and democracy in the world.

It was not long after that vote that I was at a ceremony back in Surrey and had the chance to discuss the vote with some of my constituents. I mention this ceremony because it has a very special significance in light of the vote that day. This was a ceremony for remembrance markers on the graves of our veterans, veterans who, for one reason or another, went unrecognized in death, unrecognized

for the great battles they fought for our great country. There are literally thousands of such soldiers, Canadian heroes who still lay unrecognized in cemeteries across this country.

I am proud to say that two of my constituents, Mr. Andy Block and RCMP Constable Marc Searle, brought this situation to the public's attention. I believe it brought home to us all the incredible sacrifices of the generations before us. It also brought home the incredible sacrifices of our soldiers in Afghanistan today. It made it quite clear to all of us that the defence of democracy, of the freedoms we enjoy and affirm every day in this country, is a very serious thing, indeed it is a matter of life and death.

The trust that our citizens put in us as legislators to decide upon commitments such as Afghanistan is a trust based upon the belief that we will not take shortcuts for partisan purposes.

When speaking to my constituents that day and when speaking to them since that vote, I have had a chance to explain why I voted no to this mission. The government would have us believe that Liberals do not care for freedom the way it does. It would have us believe that Liberals such as myself think that our soldiers fighting in Afghanistan is a bad thing and that we are naive enough to think democratic institutions can come before our soldiers fighting for safer schools, for running water and for safe streets.

Of course we know that, above all, we must fight the very people who do not want us to put in schools, running water and the reliable infrastructure of functioning communities. This is obvious, but here is the point. It is easy to decide to go to a country like this but it is not easy to know how and when to get out, which is why we must start with the idea of three parts of a plan for engagement. Defence, development and diplomacy have their own benchmarks. Each is a component that requires its own strategy and its own timeline. None can be viewed in isolation.

We have spent a long time inside and outside this House talking about the defence component. We have talked dollars and sometimes we have talked cents but we have not devoted a fraction of the time to talk about what we are doing with the development and diplomacy in Afghanistan. The point is that we need to talk about what our measurable targets are for a functioning democracy.

● (1220)

We are committed and I am glad we are committed to the Afghani people and the reconstruction of their society. We need to hold an emerging democracy to the same standard as we hold our own.

As with so many of the battles we enter into that soon become wars, we need to determine those standards of development and democracy. We need to determine how they can be met with the least bloodshed. Once those standards are reached, we can get out of the way and let a government, a democracy flourish on its own.

Business of Supply

The Afghanistan mission has changed in both its structure and its purpose. It has lost that crucial balance between diplomacy, development and defence. What is worse, the government has refused to commit to an exit strategy or even indicate an end date.

The Minister of National Defence has even said that the Canadian Forces could be in Afghanistan for as long as 15 years, hindering Canada's ability to undertake peacekeeping missions elsewhere in the world, such as Darfur or Haiti.

This is already one of the longest military commitments in Canadian history. It has lasted longer than the Boer War, World War I, World War II, the Suez crisis and the Korean War. In each of those wars and incidents we found resolutions through treaty or unconditional surrender.

Afghanistan is different. What we are witnessing is an insurgency that is partially being driven by Taliban terrorists but also by those who view NATO troops as foreign occupiers. The more tanks we send, the greater the perception that this is indeed the case.

We need to review the current mission. We need to put more of a focus on training the Afghan National Army and additional provincial reconstruction teams.

We must also hold parliamentary hearings in which the Conservative government fully participates so that Canadians, through their parliamentarians, can receive vital information about the mission and assess its goals.

It is only through training the Afghan army, equipping the Afghan bureaucracy with the knowledge and tools to create accountable governments and by investing in basic infrastructure that we will achieve the kind of results that will move Afghanistan forward.

All of those approaches have been given little air time by the government. Perhaps it does not see partisan gains in the real debate.

● (1225)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the comments of my colleague from British Columbia this afternoon. I am very interested in finding some kind of consensus around these issues in the House of Commons. It would be great if Canada could speak with one voice on this issue.

I am curious as to why the Liberals would be bringing forward an opposition day motion today to support the counter-insurgency mission for two years. It is only the last couple of months that this mission has been under the initiative of the Conservative government and this two year extension is the initiative of the Conservative government.

Why would the Liberals now be in support of continuing the mission until 2009 when, I believe, they voted against the extension when we had this debate in the House? I am confused on what the position actually is of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to this mission, I voted no to the extension of the mission when the motion was before the House.

The Conservative government is not clear whether it will go beyond the commitment of February 2009.

We brought forward this motion to make clear the government's position on whether it is extending the mission beyond 2009. I am supporting this motion and the mission to 2009 because it has been approved by a majority of the House. Now we have an international commitment that we Canadians need to follow until February 2009.

I certainly would agree with my hon. colleague that we should be putting more effort into the reconstruction and the development of Afghanistan than spending money on defence. The mission has changed and most of the energy that is put into this mission is in defence and only 20% of resources are put into the area of reconstruction.

● (1230)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing how the Liberals like to twist facts to suit themselves.

He mentioned that there was no debate. First, perhaps he does not know that the foreign affairs committee, as we speak, is doing a full-fledged study on our mission in Afghanistan. Four of his members are over there. Witnesses have been invited, including the Minister of National Defence, who will appear next week, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who has appeared. A thorough process is currently going on in the foreign affairs committee.

Second, perhaps he has not seen today's reports that say all human rights groups are saying that the Taliban is committing war crimes in Afghanistan by targeting civilians. What would he like to do? How would he like to help those civilians, by leaving them by themselves?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, we would like debate in the House where members of Parliament, the representatives of Canadians, make decisions. This is the place to have that debate. I suggest the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs move a motion in the House so we can debate those issues.

I also ask the hon. member to go to the defence minister, make his position clear and not flip-flop on the issues day in and day out. When will we end this combat mission? It is not the mission he described. He asked what we were doing about schools.

I repeat that 20% of the money is spent on reconstruction and development of Afghanistan and 80%, which is 900 times more than what it is supposed to be, is put toward the combat mission, which I do not support.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I begin my speech this afternoon by offering condolences to the families and loved ones of the Canadian soldiers who have fallen since we began this mission.

It is a privilege for me to have this opportunity to speak today. I know all members in the House, the people of the Churchill riding, and indeed all Canadians, join me in honouring our brave young men and women in uniform.

Business of Supply

I would also like to express how pleased I am to have the opportunity to speak on Canada's mission in Afghanistan, as it remains the most important issue in the minds and hearts of all Canadians. Moreover, the recent heightened incidence of casualties, since moving into the conflict-ridden southern Kandahar region, highlights the significance of constructive dialogue among parliamentarians on our current role and direction in Afghanistan, such as the motion we are debating today.

For me to fully contribute to the debate on this mission, I feel it is necessary to begin by explaining why I feel our current mission is important to Canadians, to the Afghan people, and to the world.

The horrific events that took place on the morning of September 11, 2001, undeniably impacted not only the United States, but Canada as well. Since this time we have witnessed changes to both our domestic and foreign policies that have been directly related to these events, which many will agree reflect the changing realities of the world we live in today.

When 9/11 occurred, it made it clear to the world that the instability in Afghanistan was a threat to the world. The Taliban was consciously harbouring terrorist groups such as Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

To help bring stability to the Middle Eastern region and Afghanistan, the United Nations Security Council authorized the creation of an international security assistance force. This UN mandated force would be composed of soldiers from NATO countries, Canada included.

Under the leadership of a Liberal government, Canadians would embark on a mission of hope. It was a mission that would bring strength to an otherwise failed and dismal state, a mission that would bring rights and education to women, and a mission that would provide opportunity and peace to the Afghan people.

To achieve this mission, the Liberal government established the 3D approach in dealing with our tasks in Afghanistan. We were to focus on diplomacy, defence and development.

Canadians across the country maintain that this is the most appropriate direction, as this mission cannot be won by focusing efforts and capital on military above the rest. We must acknowledge and embrace our genuine partnership with the Karzai government. Through diplomacy we can build stronger ties and assist the Afghan people with their emerging democracy.

On the ground, we must continue to work hard to earn the trust and respect of the Afghan people. This aspect of the relationship must obviously be addressed through economic opportunities and developmental aid toward reconstruction efforts.

However, Canadians also acknowledge the challenges of such a complex mission and the attached risks.

As I mentioned earlier, we have witnessed a drastic increase in fatalities, the vast majority of which have occurred during combat or in bomb attacks by insurgents. This is why it is absolutely imperative to provide adequate military support to the Canadian armed forces and not put them in harm's way.

Canada's efforts in Afghanistan have been extraordinarily successful. In fact, I recall when Afghan President Hamid Karzai visited Canada last year, he praised the work of our Canadian soldiers and development workers. He said in an interview with the CBC:

Your military presence is a must because without that, we would not be able to keep our country together, and your reconstruction activity is necessary because it gives us economic opportunity and employment and a better quality of life...

The president was truly thankful for our cooperative support and commitment to stability and development in his ravaged country. However, his visit was underlined with his persistence to address the situation with a balanced approach.

The Liberals balanced foreign policy for Afghanistan was clear for our Canadian soldiers who would be fighting, as well as their families and communities watching from a distance.

● (1235)

Members on this side of the House are able to contrast that initiative with the ambiguous and misguided direction that the current Conservative government seems to be taking, most notably the shameless news to hold a parliamentary vote on a two-year extension of our mission after a mere six hours of debate in the House.

In the Prime Minister's speech in the chamber on May 17, 2006, he cited the willingness of other NATO countries to contribute their forces to the joint mission, such as Netherlands and the United Kingdom. However, perhaps the Prime Minister can take some notes from our Dutch counterparts, which participated in 10 weeks of constructive debate rather than six hours of debate with 36 hours' notice prior to a vote.

To date, our military commitment is scheduled to end in February 2009. As always, Canada will live up to our word to the international community and the Afghan people and not pull out early as many have repeatedly demanded.

Members on this side of the House believe that the Conservative government is not holding other NATO countries accountable to contribute their fair share toward military and reconstruction efforts in the volatile Kandahar region. To make matters even worse, two weeks ago the Conservative defence minister said that Canada would stay in Afghanistan until 2009 and that the Conservatives would re-evaluate next year whether to extend the mission. Now the minister has admitted that the mission has not even been discussed in cabinet.

The minister's incompetence is insulting to Canadians and, quite frankly, draws into question the minister's overall credibility. I know the constituents in my riding expect more from their government when it comes to responsible foreign policies and defence. They expect clear and strong leadership as opposed to the uncertain and contradictory sentiments we have been receiving from the government.

As Liberals, we unequivocally support Canada's troops. We believe supporting our troops means providing clear, responsible leadership on Afghanistan. Out of respect for our courageous soldiers and their supporting, loving families, we demand that the Conservative government begin to take this mission seriously and stop misleading the House, our soldiers and their families.

Business of Supply

• (1240)

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is confusing trying to keep track of where the Liberal Party stands on this. The deputy leader of the Liberal Party said:

“Liberals need to remember this is a Liberal mission”, he said. “We’re in Afghanistan because of the leadership of the two previous Liberal governments...We, as a party, cannot abandon what is right or what we believe for political convenience.”

Why have the Liberals opted for political convenience today rather than what is right? Why are they abandoning the children in Afghanistan, for example, the 4.3 million who were vaccinated against childhood diseases, or the 4,000 new medical facilities? Why are they abandoning hope in Afghanistan for political convenience?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I am as shocked and confused as the member opposite. When he talks about confusion, I will take the opportunity to quote the Conservatives' defence minister, who has not been clear, has not provided clarity and has in fact misled the House. It is troubling. The defence minister stated last Sunday, on April 15, that not only had cabinet failed to discuss the timeline of the current combat mission, it had no plan to discuss it until next year.

That admission came at a time when Canada suffered its bloodiest week in combat in 50 years. Therefore, why is the Conservative government not taking steps to ensure that our NATO allies can take over in Kandahar by 2009.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year I faced the choice in Parliament to support the mission in Afghanistan or not. I chose not to support it at that time. Since that time, I have read many documents. I have attended forums. I have looked at all the evidence I can and have come to the conclusion that I was right in not supporting the mission, and I will continue, along with my party, not support the mission.

The position the Liberals are adopting with this motion is one that will ask for an end to the mission in 2009 rather than today. This says to the soldiers that whatever happens in Afghanistan they are finished in 2009. How does that make the soldiers feel, who have to continue this mission for another two years—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Churchill.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that I was not able to hear the rest of the question from the member opposite.

I too voted in the House not to support the extension. I did so not with any intent to hinder the support for our forces in Afghanistan, but certainly because I felt it was an unfair vote that was put to this House. I think that without debate and without clarity about the mission it was unfair for parliamentarians to have to vote on this extension.

In fact, it was the first time in approximately 70 years, I think, that parliamentarians were expected to vote on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We have time for one more very brief question and comment. Because it is a Liberal member speaking, I cannot take a Liberal question at this time. I will go to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Briefly, Mr. Speaker, the member cites the need for a lengthy debate, but the reality is that when her Liberal government sent our troops to Afghanistan it gave the army 15 minutes' notice and had no debate and no vote in the House of Commons.

My question has to do with the fact that I am very disappointed that she is playing politics on the backs of our soldiers. Does she not understand that the Taliban follows the media and that by her party bringing forward this motion it is actually emboldening the Taliban to increase the attacks on our soldiers in Afghanistan? Does she not recognize the risk to which she is putting our men and women in uniform?

• (1245)

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I find it absolutely insulting not only to me and members of the House but to Canadians and to our troops that the member would even allude to such a thing. We did not vote in the House because this is the role of cabinet. The members opposite are aware that the previous government had been involved with the NATO discussions since 2001. It was a number of agreements at that level that Canada participated in at—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in this place to again speak to the subject of Afghanistan.

I almost wish I was rising to ask a question of the person from whom we just heard who said that it is the role of cabinet to make the decisions about whether or not we are in Afghanistan. I am thankful that we have a Prime Minister who brought this to Parliament. Although we were not the government that sent our troops there, we supported the government in doing so. We also recognize that it is not just the role of cabinet. All Parliament should hear.

It is a real privilege to split my time today with my colleague, the member of Parliament for Prince George—Peace River.

I have the privilege of serving in this Parliament in a number of capacities, one being as chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. I want to commend all members of that committee from all parties and say that again we have the privilege of studying the issue of Afghanistan and Canada's role there.

It is important that we have this type of debate. We have had it in the past. It is important for Canadians to get as much information as possible about what our troops are doing in Afghanistan. It is not an exercise that Canadian troops and Canadian governments take lightly. We want to make sure that we are making certain achievements, and we see that, and it is good that Canadians can hear that today.

Business of Supply

First, Canadians should be proud of the men and women of our troops, who are serving not only Canada in Afghanistan, but serving NATO and the United Nations. Afghanistan is a country that is emerging from years of war and destruction. Afghanistan is a country that is looking for hope. Its people understand democracies to a certain degree and they want to try to achieve a democratic country.

In this country, we know that it is not just a general election that forms a democracy, but rights, values, principles and the rule of law, all those things. Canadians wish to extend those same rights and those same benefits to countries and regions all around the world and very specifically to Afghanistan.

Canada is working hard to support this process. Not only are we working hard to back our military, our defence and our troops, but we are working very hard to support the process of extending human rights and those priorities that Canadians have.

Our soldiers, our Canadian development workers and our diplomats are helping Afghans pursue their legitimate aspirations of peace and security and a guarantee of a better future for their country and for their children.

The progress made by the people of Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime has been very impressive and we must take every opportunity to ensure that Canadians are aware of their own role in this success.

Today I would like to tell members of the House of Commons about what Canada has done to help develop and support development in Afghanistan.

A number of speeches have been given, and there will be more, but I want to look specifically at one of the issues that has come forward at our committee, and that is how women's lives very clearly have been changed in Afghanistan. I want to take a very brief look this afternoon at how we have made an impact for the women in Afghanistan.

We know that these women bear the lion's share of the responsibility for looking after the health and the educational needs of their families. In many places, the men, the husbands, are out working, but the mothers and the women of the communities are the ones on whom a great deal of the burden falls.

When the women have the opportunity to participate more broadly in their communities, development progress takes place at a greater pace and their families benefit even more. For that reason, Canadian development assistance places a priority on ensuring the equality of women.

In Afghanistan Canada has helped over 300,000 Afghans, 72% of them women, to obtain small loans and financial services to start their own businesses, their micro-businesses, or to purchase tools so that, even very primitively, they can become engaged in agriculture and farming in order to facilitate and meet their families' needs.

• (1250)

Another Canadian project supports the renovation of up to 4,000 community schools. For the first time, many young girls are able to attend these schools. Extracurricular activities are created around the

schools so that these children and these communities find something to do with their time, something that is going to enhance their communities. Through all these schools, 9,000 teachers will be trained. This project, whose essential goal is to educate girls, has a budget of \$14.5 million.

Why is the government responding in this kind of way? Because we recognize the importance of making sure that boys and girls and men and women get the type of education that is needed in the long term. It is not just to solve the problem of getting them into schools now, but to solve the problem in the long term so that we can see productivity in a country where it has been so badly lacking over the years.

Last fall the Minister of International Cooperation announced another project, with a \$5 million budget, intended to help some 1,500 Afghan women develop horticultural operations in home based gardens. By growing fruits and vegetables, they supplement their families' diets, they supplement their families' incomes, and they generate an income and again become productive.

Canadians are encouraging women to participate in local development. More than 16,000 community development councils have been elected across Afghanistan. On many of these councils women are participating for the first time as full members, making important decisions and playing a role in how these projects can be delivered to improve, for example, public health in Afghanistan. As well, the women are the ones who are making decisions on the curriculum and the education for their communities.

Canada is working to make women's rights known in Afghanistan. Again, it is not simply that we want to educate the children. We want Afghans to know what is acceptable when it comes to women's rights. We have helped to open centres where women can get legal advice, find shelter, take literacy training or obtain health services.

We are supporting the democratization of Afghanistan. The country has adopted a new constitution. It has held presidential and parliamentary elections.

I am not certain of the percentage of women in our Parliament. The other day here many people wore pins that stated, "Elect more women". I know that 25% of the parliamentarians in Afghanistan are women, a higher percentage than Canada's. They are contributing in that manner and they are showing the country that there is a place for them in their democracy.

We are promoting the education of girls. Today 5.5 million Afghan children to go school. A third of these children are girls. This is something that country has not seen before.

These initiatives show the very concrete steps that Canadians are taking in Afghanistan to help Afghanistan rebuild. There is a long road ahead.

Today in committee, a former journalist and an expert on Afghanistan, Mr. Van Praagh, stated the following in his presentation: "Democracies and would-be democracies near and far will suffer a great defeat in the greater game if Afghanistan, Canadian credibility and NATO effectiveness are lost".

Business of Supply

I ask members to listen again as I repeat it: “Democracies and would-be democracies near and far will suffer a severe defeat in the greater game...”.

What is that greater game? It is the greater game of spreading these rights and freedoms, the democracy, the values and the principles that we appreciate here, and this will suffer a great defeat if the credibility of Canadians and NATO there in Afghanistan is lost.

•(1255)

We can make a difference in that country. Canada has always looked for places where we can make a difference. It is one thing to talk about sending aid here and sending aid there, but when we are in a place where we can make a difference and when we make that difference, let us make sure that we continue to do that. Let us make sure that we continue to do the fine job that we are doing.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the very vocal member for Crowfoot, for whom I have great respect and affection. The problem is that I felt his speech was aimed more at the NDP than the Liberal Party.

Today, it is important to understand the mission. We all support this mission, or at least our respective parties do. Not only do we support this mission, but we are also saying that, based on what the government decided in light of the motion we adopted at the time, February 2009 will be the end date.

In our opinion, it is clear that this is not a Canadian mission, but a NATO one. And to better serve Canada, the Prime Minister should call for the resignation of the Minister of National Defence.

I would like to ask my colleague a question. I am happy that he spoke about rights and so forth. In fact, I would have liked him to have celebrated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but his government did not want to. Does he think it is right to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on equipment, when we know perfectly well that it will not be ready for the mission? I am talking about the tanks.

Here is the real question: since he is not afraid of giving his opinion, can he say if he thinks we should stay after February 2009? What is his position on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, do I believe that Canada should stay past 2009? I will say that is what I do think. I think that Canada in the long term will be providing humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. Right now Afghanistan is our number one recipient country around the world. We have always been there for countries like Haiti. We have always been there for sub-Saharan countries in Africa. We have always been there in many of those countries and we have not been asked for total exit strategies from any of those countries.

Certainly in the long term I hope that Afghanistan is secure, that the Afghan army and the police force can secure the country in Afghanistan so that Canadians stay there and continue the fantastic work that they are doing in education and many other areas.

Brian MacDonald, a senior defence analyst with the Conference of Defence Associations appeared before our committee yesterday. He said that without the military provided security, there is not any chance of any type of development. We want to assure that development.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a great degree of interest to the member's speech. He really did speak of a lot of things which I think most members of Parliament could agree are good things that are happening in Afghanistan. However, this motion deals with the counter-insurgency efforts in the south of Afghanistan.

Last year the Dutch as well entered southern Afghanistan in another province. Their approach has been remarkably different. Has the member looked at other approaches to what could have happened in Afghanistan and recognized where the failings of this mission have taken place in south Afghanistan?

•(1300)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, this mission is not failing. This mission is succeeding. This government is only looking forward to success. Someone has said the best exit strategy is success. That is what I believe we are going to look for in the long term.

Have we looked at other ways that we could have, would have, should have? Yes, we have. Some very strong experts have said that as soon as Russia exited from Afghanistan, that is when NATO, the UN, and countries should have picked up the dropped ball. But we did not. A regime came in that helped facilitate terrorism. A regime came in that ignored the rights of men and women. A regime came in that said there is no such thing as religious freedom, there is no such thing as young ladies going to school, there are no such things. Perhaps that is when we dropped the ball.

Do we have an exit strategy? I always say the best exit strategy is to win.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and privilege for me to speak to this motion today. I appreciate that my colleague, the member for Crowfoot, is splitting his time with me and is allowing me this opportunity.

I want to begin by talking about the greatest privilege and honour that I have had certainly in my nearly 14 years as a parliamentarian, but also probably the greatest privilege I have had in my lifetime. That was to spend Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day on the ground in Afghanistan with our troops celebrating Christmas there in Afghanistan.

Why was that such a great privilege? Because I passionately believe that the greatest gift any citizen can give to his or her country is to serve it in a time of war. The greatest sacrifice any citizen, and by extension one's family, can make for one's country, is to put one's life on the line defending the things and the values in which we believe so strongly, the values of freedom and democracy, the things that have been granted to us by the sacrifices of thousands in the past. That is why it was such a huge privilege for me to be in Afghanistan at Christmastime.

I remember speaking in the forward operating bases with the young men and women, and there are many women who are there fighting the Taliban as well as young men, and having some come up to me afterward and saying that I must have drawn the short straw to have to spend my Christmas away from my family and there with them. I said it was quite the contrary. My two colleagues and I who were privileged to join the chief of the defence staff, General Hillier, and others in Afghanistan had to lobby to get there. We wanted to be there to show our young men and women in uniform who are over there doing this tremendous job for us that they and their mission have our unqualified support.

Regarding this whole nonsense that somehow we can support the troops and yet be opposed to the mission, I can say, having visited with a great many of these young men and women there, that they do not draw that distinction. Why? Because they believe heart and soul in what they are doing and so do their families. Their families support them. Obviously they are worried about them, worried sick about them, but they know why they are there.

I believe that we should be taking the lead from the troops. If they and their families are willing to make that sacrifice, if they believe in the mission, then who are we to doubt it, for it is they who are making the sacrifice.

I made a promise when I was there at Christmastime. I made a promise to those young men and women that I would carry their message back here at every opportunity. I have done that in my riding; I have done that at every opportunity I have had, like today, to speak about the successes they are gaining, inch by inch, yard by yard, at the cost of their blood. I made a promise that I would carry that message back to Canada, as did my colleagues who were there on that trip with me.

I want to bring forward in this debate a rather famous quote from Edmund Burke, someone who is highly regarded as perhaps the father of modern conservatism. He said, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing". I think that statement could be amended in this modern age to refer to good men and good women, but the sentiment is right.

We should never lose sight during this debate of why we originally went to Afghanistan. We went there to track down and bring to justice Osama bin Laden and his henchmen as the evil mastermind and financier of 9/11. We went there to ensure that Afghanistan would never, ever again be a bastion of terrorism, a home for the training ground for terrorists to launch their attacks around the world.

● (1305)

How is it that we have forgotten that, that we have lost sight of that? We need to remember the lessons of history, and I will get into that in a second.

I want to read the part that I find most offensive about the Liberal motion. It is this, and I quote from the Liberal motion that we are debating today:

—this House call upon the government to confirm that Canada's existing military deployment in Afghanistan will continue until February 2009, at which time Canadian combat operations in Southern Afghanistan will conclude;

Business of Supply

Think of that, imagine, reflect back. I fashion myself to be a fairly elementary student of military history and the lessons of the past. Think about if this place had passed a motion in 1939 saying that we will engage in combat—

Hon. Denis Coderre: Oh, come on.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, they do not like this but it is the truth. They should learn from history.

Imagine if in 1939 this place said that we were going to engage in combat, that the evil of Adolf Hitler and the evil of Benito Mussolini should be brought to justice, but—

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

This is outrageous.

[*Translation*]

There is no need to make comparisons to Nazi Germany. We support the mission and what he said is completely indefensible and unconscionable. I would ask him to withdraw his statements.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I do not think that is technically a point of order. I did not hear the Chief Government Whip disparage any kind of motives.

Hon. Denis Coderre: How dare he say that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, order. We are going to have a little bit of order for the rest of the speech by the Chief Government Whip. If members take issue with something that is said in the speech, then they can certainly respond to that in questions and comments. I have not heard any unparliamentary language yet. As soon as I hear something, I will stand up and stop it, but we need to have some order as we finish off the debate in this round.

The hon. Chief Government Whip.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that you are going to add that time to my short 10 minutes.

We on this side of the House believe fervently that we are combating the most evil people in the world today. We believe that the Taliban and al-Qaeda are evil.

● (1310)

Hon. Denis Coderre: You supported the mission. We initiated the mission. You do not know what you are talking about, that is your problem.

Hon. Jay Hill: You do not support the mission.

The reality is we believe that we are engaged in a war on terrorism, a war on evil people, just as we were during the first and second world wars. We believe that these people have to be brought to justice.

Business of Supply

As I was about to say, imagine if in 1939 this place passed a motion saying we were going to engage in combat, we are going to try and bring Adolf Hitler to justice and all the Nazis who support him, but we were only going to do it for a couple of years. Imagine if we said in 1943 that we were going to cut and run, we were going to get out of there. Imagine if we said whether we won or lost, whether they were brought to justice or not, we were going to quit. Imagine that.

Those members say they believe in the mission. Not a chance. The mission is to bring these people to justice. The mission is to ensure democracy and freedom in Afghanistan. The mission is to ensure that country is never used again as a base for terrorism, as a base to launch worldwide terrorist attacks such as the one that took the lives of over 2,000 people at the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and in that hijacked aircraft—

An hon. member: Including Canadians.

Hon. Jay Hill: —including Canadians.

Countries have tried isolationism in the past. Countries have tried pacifism in the past, and it does not work when dealing with evil people and evil regimes. Let us look at history.

Do I wish that our NATO allies would step up to the plate more in southern Afghanistan and carry some of the heavy lifting that we and a few others have been doing? Of course I do. The troops do as well. They told me that when I was there. We all do. I would remind people who are viewing this debate today that this is nothing new.

Did our forefathers wish the Americans had become engaged in World War I before 1917? Of course they did. What did the Americans learn by being isolationists before 1941 when for nearly two and a half years Canada and our allies carried the fight with the Nazis? They learned, much to their horror, with Pearl Harbour, that isolationism does not work when we are dealing with evil.

The NDP has suggested that somehow we can reason with the Taliban, somehow we can negotiate with al-Qaeda. That is ridiculous. That does not even warrant serious debate. There is only one way to defeat evil and that is to fight it with all our strength, to fight it with all our courage every day, and to fight it united. If we give in to temptation and support this ridiculous motion, evil will triumph.

The Liberals may honestly believe that this debate and this motion will somehow give some comfort to the men and women in Afghanistan and to the grieving families of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, but it will not. It will only give comfort to our enemies, to the Taliban.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too want to pay my condolences to the families and friends of yet another lost Canadian soldier.

After listening very carefully to that speaker, I would suggest to him that he read the points that this motion is based on. He was totally off in a different direction by talking about the second world war. Let us put everything into perspective.

As the Leader of the Opposition and as the defence critic clearly pointed out earlier today, this is an international mission. Canada

committed to a certain timeframe. Unfortunately, the Conservative government prematurely committed to extend it without any conditions. I want the member to answer to those so-called caveats. The government is stuck with this without being able to take off these so-called caveats.

If we are in this mission together like we were during the second world war that he referred to, we should engage collectively. Other nations do not want to get involved. They say they suckered the Canadians to be there because we committed without putting in the terms of engagement first.

How does the member answer to his people and to the military? It is shameful to say that we do not support our military because we want to debate this motion.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I singled out the part of the motion that I find personally the most reprehensible and the most offensive.

The member talks about conditions. What are the conditions for extraction? What are the conditions for ending the mission? As one of my colleagues who spoke before me said, the condition is success.

This is the part the Liberals do not understand and that I was trying to communicate. I hope, for the viewing public at home today and those in the gallery, that I am doing a reasonable job of trying to communicate this. When someone is in a life and death struggle against evil there are no conditions for withdrawal. It is either win or lose and that is how simple it is.

For the other parties to somehow suggest that we can set some parameters around a fight against evil is extremely shortsighted. It does a complete disservice to both the men and women in Afghanistan on the front lines and their families back home.

• (1315)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I find it actually quite terrifying to listen to the chief government ship. He states that all the Taliban are evil, that there is nothing but winning or losing, and that there is nothing but a military approach to dealing with the insecurity and the very severe complex problems that exist in Afghanistan today.

He advocates in a very specific way that not only should we completely ignore the idea that supporting our troops means asking tough questions on their behalf, doing our homework and where the mission is failing actually being prepared to stand up against the abuse from the government to say so and, if necessary, against public opinion to say let us find alternative approaches. His suggestion was that we should actually take our lead from the troops themselves on what the military strategy should be.

Does the member, in taking that position, actually reject totally the position that has been expressed publicly again and again by many distinguished military leaders who say that there is a very important reason why parliamentarians are responsible to make these decisions and not the troops and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. chief government whip.

Business of Supply

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the agreement that we have entered into with the government of Afghanistan and our allies, the Afghanistan Compact, very clearly lays out the conditions of success. The key there is the conditions of success.

That is why I return to my earlier point. There is a struggle here against an evil, the likes of which are the Taliban. For that member to suggest that we can negotiate with people that would come into a school and behead a teacher in front of a class because that person dared to teach a female child, a girl, that somehow we can negotiate with that type of evil, is ridiculous. There is only one way and that is to engage—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. There has been quite a lot of disorder in the last few minutes. The hon. chief government whip has about 20 seconds left to respond to the question. I would like to be able to hear him.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I will conclude. To the troops on the ground in the forward bases that I was so privileged and honoured to talk with that are engaging the Taliban in active combat, as they are today, that are pushing back the Taliban to win the rights and freedoms for the people of Afghanistan, I am keeping my promise.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that I will be splitting my time with the member for Richmond Hill.

As I stand here to debate this motion today, I want to first extend my deep sympathy to the families and friends of all the soldiers who paid the ultimate price and sacrificed their lives serving their country. I also want to wish all who have been injured a full and speedy recovery.

Today I am going to refrain from using any partisan finger pointing. Given the magnitude of this matter, I am hoping that by avoiding partisan accusations parliamentarians will actually debate the substance of this motion and not be distracted by one-upmanship in order to make a point. This discussion is not only critical for Canadians and our Canadian soldiers, but it is also very important for Afghanistan and our international partners.

Today many doubts persist about the future and success of our current mission in Afghanistan. The goals of the current mission in Kandahar appear to be ambiguous and uncertain. Canadians have many questions about our strategy in achieving our goals and about tangible signs of success. They have questions about the length of this mission. They have questions about the exit transition. Surely these questions deserve real discussion and responsible answers.

Canadians supported the initial deployment in Afghanistan. The original goals were to help the Afghani nation dispose of horrible, radical and destructive elements and to participate in helping establish a democratic system that would enable genuine progress. Recently though, Canadians have been observing a marked change in tone and scope when it comes to this mission.

It appears that the current approach is not working. It is unquestionable that the Taliban has gained popularity and support. It is undeniable that opium growth has more than doubled over the past year. It is a fact that our Canadian troops have been suffering more casualties.

I want to encourage all parliamentarians who are going to engage in this discussion to avoid the silly accusation we have already heard today that this debate offends our troops or represents a lack of support for their sincere work. Parliamentarians and Canadians are extremely proud of our soldiers and support them wholeheartedly.

This is exactly why we are having this debate and this is exactly why Canadians are watching this debate. Our support must be expressed by being responsible when making serious decisions about their future deployments. So for anyone who is thinking about it, please spare us the rhetoric and help us focus on a healthy, serious and effective debate that will honour the sacrifice of our soldiers and their keen willingness to serve our country.

I would also caution any parliamentarian who will spend most of their time describing the ruthlessness of the Taliban and its supporters. All Canadians are aware of the Taliban. This not about whether the Taliban is evil. What we need to examine is how effectively we are helping the Afghan people to progress and to prosper.

If our mission strategy is to chase Taliban elements around the rural areas of Afghanistan, it would be fair to assume that this would become an endless and counterproductive objective. This would only embolden the Taliban and stir resentment among villagers.

The best approach to defeat the Taliban is to marginalize it by offering hopeful alternatives to Afghans and shutting the door on its attempts to exploit frustrated and angry villagers. We must focus our efforts on creating a vibrant and rewarding environment where civil institutions are strong, job opportunities are growing, political expressions are encouraged and education is accessible.

If we make this mission into a pure military operation, no one wins. If we frame this mission as a form of retribution, it loses sight of its real intended objectives, and if we focus on engaging the Taliban in an arms race as the minister has said, it is bound to turn into an aimless and endless goal. Our soldiers have served honourably for five years in Afghanistan and by 2009 it will be seven years.

● (1320)

We must take a long, hard look at what we have accomplished to date, celebrate our successes and learn from our experience. It is unacceptable that we bury our heads in the sand and pretend that all is well.

There are many real and serious questions. The government is making these questions more urgent by remaining ambiguous and unclear about the future of the mission.

Canadians are uncertain about the intention of the government in regard to the future of our deployment. We all know that Canada is committed until 2009. What we do not know is the intention of the government beyond that. The Conservatives insinuate that we could be there for an additional 10 to 15 years, but when they are asked direct questions, they avoid clear answers.

Business of Supply

With this motion, we are hoping to send a clear message to all Canadians about what the House of Commons expects in the future for the mission. By voting to support the motion, we are making it clear that we want our troops to leave the southern part of Afghanistan by 2009. By voting against the motion, parliamentarians will further confuse Canadians and send mixed messages about what are our goals. Canadians want answers to legitimate and fair questions. They expect these questions to be handled thoughtfully and openly. We do not want to lose our focus and get distracted by blind emotions or ideology.

The mission is multidimensional, complex and it deserves thoughtful deliberation. Simplistic and one dimensional slogans are not satisfactory. One need only examine history or current world affairs, including what is happening in Iraq, to see that even the most sincere intentions can end in failure if various cultural, humanitarian, military and economical aspects are not considered. Reflecting on these factors is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of strength. Ignoring these factors can only be interpreted as a sign of weakness and negligence.

Canadians want us to ensure that our brave troops are sent on peacekeeping missions with well defined goals, a clearly outlined strategy and a well defined time commitment. Canadians can also see that we need to re-examine our current strategy and clearly explain the horizons of our goal and scope.

That is exactly why I am supporting the motion.

● (1325)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member, as well as myself and others, had an opportunity to talk to a lot of veterans or people from the military who have been in Afghanistan, who know what is going on and have been on the front lines. There is one person I talk to extensively about it. He spent over a year there. He is a pretty close member of my family.

In 2006 there was a vote in the House that said we would stay in Afghanistan till 2009. The first question I had from some of the people who had been there was, "Whatever makes people in the House of Commons think that by 2009 it would be the time to move out? Whatever put it in their heads that would be the time to leave Afghanistan?"

One person was seriously aggravated, asking if we were saying that we should pull out of Afghanistan at a specific time, that we should give the enemy enough time to survive until then and let them rebuild and become very strong so maybe they could bring the battle to the soil of Canada, to the North American continent. He asked if we did not realize that the Taliban and al-Qaeda were trying to destroy western civilization. He wondered why we were saying there would be an end when we would have to pull back. He said that they would be on our soil and that we would have to defend our people on our land. If that was the case, why were we not going after them?

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with veterans and with soldiers. There is no doubt that there is a difference of opinion among many soldiers and veterans about the conduct of the mission.

I would request the hon. member to ask the Prime Minister why he put the motion that the mission would only be extended to 2009.

Today we are asking what the government's plan is beyond 2009. Many of us are saying that we must pull out by 2009. Is the member telling us, are the Conservatives telling us that they want to stay beyond 2009? How long do they want to stay? What is it they want to accomplish? Is it to help the Afghani people or is it to go on a witch hunt, killing everybody around the rural areas of the Taliban? What do they want to accomplish? Tell us what they want to accomplish.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Destroy the enemy. That's what war is all about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Let us have a little order for the rest of the questions and comments.

The hon. member for Halifax.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the comments of the member for Mississauga—Erindale and I do not question his sincerity for a moment. In fact, I think he is one of the more serious and thoughtful members of the Liberal Party in Parliament.

Last evening I had the opportunity to meet and speak with a young man I had not met before. He was recently honoured in this community for his contribution to a greater understanding of what was happening in Afghanistan and for his contribution to peace building.

He stated, unequivocally, from a position of knowledge, intelligence and thoughtfulness, that without question, despite the sincerity, courage and effectiveness of our troops in Kandahar, what we were doing in Kandahar today was making the situation worse. There is greater insecurity, more deaths directly and indirectly of civilians, a great loss of life to our troops. He argued vociferously that we needed to end the Kandahar mission of aggressive combat and enter into meaningful negotiations, peace building activity and—

● (1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We will not have time for the rest of that question.

The hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale has about 45 seconds to respond.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I understand what the hon. member is saying. Canada right now has a commitment until 2009. What Liberals will continue to do from now until then is urge the government to exercise wisdom in its decisions of how it conducts the mission and to focus on diplomacy and development as well as defence.

However, the motion talks about what we will do beyond 2009 and encourages the government to withdraw our troops after 2009.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first would like to salute our brave men and women in Afghanistan who put their lives on the line every day for this country.

Business of Supply

Having visited our troops in Afghanistan in May 2006, I can tell members they are the most committed personnel we will ever see and they understand why they are there. I believe all members of Parliament, regardless of party, support our troops in the field.

However, we should understand this motion. The motion clearly says that we will end our military engagement in Kandahar in February 2009. It does not preclude other Canadian activity, military, diplomatic or development-wise, in other parts of the country. It talks about in Kandahar.

This is not solely a Canadian mission. Under the auspices of the United Nations, and NATO in particular, we are shouldering the responsibility along with other NATO allies. What is important to keep in mind is that the government has not announced, in terms of rotation, to NATO who will come after us, as we did before, under the previous Liberal government, in Kabul where the Turks came in after Canadian troops had served there. Therefore, the issue is about notifying NATO that someone else will have to step up to the plate.

We are not abandoning Afghanistan. Nor are we walking away. We may in fact have a different focus in Afghanistan after February 2009. However, as long as we are in Kandahar until February 2009, this party and our leader has made it very clear that we support our men and women in the field. Do not suggest otherwise. To be very clear, we support our men and women.

We want to point out that Canada has contributed significantly in the field. Although some NATO allies have covenants about terms of engagement, we believe very strongly on this side of the House that the government needs to continue to pressure our NATO allies to put more troops in the field and to assist in shouldering the responsibilities that we have under this mission. Now we only have six countries out of twenty six that are prepared to do so. That is not good enough. Canadians are prepared to, in some cases, give the ultimate sacrifice, but we cannot do it alone. It is not solely a Canadian mission.

We also need to ensure that the government puts more pressure on Pakistan. Having been in Pakistan on two occasions, recently in February, I had the opportunity to speak with both the foreign affairs chairs for the Senate and the House of Pakistan. They indicated they had 80,000 troops along the border, but, clearly, it is a very porous border. Obviously there are also political issues in Pakistan itself, but it recognizes the contribution of this country. Pakistan is stepping up to the plate more than it has in the past. Prime Minister Aziz had indicated very strongly to me that it was working with their allies, including Canada and the United States, to seek out, capture or destroy Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. However, we need more diplomatic pressure, and the government can do that.

The problem is the focus of the government has been purely military. It has not been on the other two aspects, which are critically important, diplomacy and development, which I will speak about a little later.

We have an opportunity not only in assisting and training the national Afghan army but, in particular, the national police. Back in May 2006, six RCMP officers and one officer from Charlottetown were in Kandahar helping, but that is not enough. We have a lot of opportunity and expertise to assist the police. One of the problems,

quite frankly, is they are not paid on a regular basis. Another aspect is they do not have the right training and motivation, and that needs to be done.

Again, we are shouldering our responsibility. It was the Liberal government that stepped up to the plate after 9/11. We support this mission. Any suggestion that we do not is pure fallacy. The fact is, by February 2009 we are saying that others have come up to the plate and we need to look at other opportunities for Canada.

● (1335)

I would suggest a couple of things. First, when our leader indicated very clearly that we support this mission, he also said that we should not forget the important role that we have in the diplomatic community and how we can assist in that regard. Again, we do not hear enough about that. If in fact that is going on, we need to hear more and see more transparency on that particular issue.

We know that when it comes to the issue of the poppies, we could be doing more. We know we could be doing more in terms of CIDA. We hear about all these projects that are being created by CIDA. I can say that, in the short term, these projects are very good and putting young women and young children back to school is extremely important. However, the sustainability of some of these projects is what we must question because three or four months after the buildings have been built we often hear that they have been destroyed by fire and so on by either the Taliban or al-Qaeda forces. Therefore, we need to look at a strategy more in terms of longevity. I think that is extremely important.

There is no question that we have had a disproportionate number of casualties compared, say, to the Dutch who are in an equally difficult position, but we have never shrunk from our responsibilities. However, the question I have for the government is why is it reluctant to put pressure on our allies to say that by February 2009, a date which the government proposed in the House back in May 2006, we will end our military involvement in this region, we are now seeking a rotation, as we did previously, but we will not be walking away.

The Prime Minister used the term "cut and run". I do not remember anyone on this side of the House ever suggesting that. In fact, I find it extremely offensive to suggest that anyone on this side of the House would do so.

We believe, though, that we cannot have a military option without a diplomatic option and without a development option. If we really want to improve the lives of the average Afghani, we need to coordinate better all of the development aid that is going in, to which about 44% can only be spent currently by five major ministries in the Afghan government.

Business of Supply

Again, there is the issue of accountability. Where is this money going? In terms of our aid, Afghanistan is not even among the 25 CIDA recipients and yet the bulk of our aid is going to Afghanistan. If it is going to go there, we need to be able to say that this is the status of the project, this is what is happening and this is where we are going with this particular project because we must ensure we are getting value for dollar.

At the moment, through our provincial reconstruction teams, as the House knows, we are very active but again we cannot do one without the other. We need to have them there.

I think President Karzai has been very clear on that. A military option alone will not solve the problem. We must work with our allies to be effective. Again, without that ability and without the government making it clear to those allies, we will continue to have uncertainty. Uncertainty is not good for our troops overseas and it is not good for the Canadian public. As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to do our utmost to ensure an improvement.

When I see young girls going to school for the first time and learning to read and write and learning certain skills, this is something we did not see under the Taliban. We want to ensure this continues forever but we will not be able to do that unless we work in a coordinated manner with our allies to ensure this is done.

The government's response is that if we do not support 100% the direction of the government we are not supporting the troops. That is not true. We will not take a back seat to anyone when it comes to the support of our personnel overseas but we also will not shirk from our responsibility of indicating very strongly to Canadians and to our allies that they need to take more responsibility and that from six of the twenty-six that they all must end these covenants, that they must become actively engaged and that we must be doing what is the right thing, not only for the Afghan people but for our personnel whether they be military or otherwise.

• (1340)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a little confused about the Liberal Party's position on the Afghanistan mission because late last year the current leader of the official opposition stated that he wanted to withdraw all our troops from Afghanistan with honour. Now he is stating, through this motion, that he only wants to withdraw the troops from southern Afghanistan.

Late last year he stated that he would not take any action without consulting with our NATO allies and yet this motion in front of the House states that no consultations are to take place. As a matter of fact, it calls upon the government to notify NATO of this decision immediately. There are no consultations, only withdrawal from southern Afghanistan, whereas late last year it was consultations with our NATO allies and the withdrawal of all our troops from Afghanistan with "honour".

Therefore, I am confused about the Liberal Party's position on this. I do not think it has made the case as to how withdrawing troops from southern Afghanistan would actually enhance the stability of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no confusion.

There is no question that if we are going to notify NATO of our intent to withdraw our troops from the Kandahar region in February 2009, then the government has the responsibility is to ensure there are other troops for the rotation. That is what the previous Liberal government did. I do not think there is any question that we notify them in the consultation.

The problem is that the government refuses to say whether or not it is even going to consult in terms of this date. It came up with this artificial date of February 2009. The House voted, and we take the will of the House, that we will accept February 2009. I would suggest that in those intervening two years since that motion leading up to 2009, the government will have lots of time to indicate what progress, if any, it is making in that regard.

The leader of the official opposition was more than clear. If we read his speech at the Université de Montréal in February 2007, it said that we will be there until February 2009, pursuant to the resolution in this House.

What the member does not seem to understand is that if we are going to notify NATO, we expect NATO to then be in a position to say, "Yes, and the rotation will be country X". That is what we did and that is what I expect the government to do.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to get some clarification from the Liberal Party on this because we are confused over here.

Initially we had a party that said that we will go ahead and go to the mission in the south. I need to be very clear. The military was given 45 minutes' notice and we had a general who quit. That, clearly, is not the way to go. We now have a government that seems to be making it up as we go along.

We need to be clear with the men and women who are putting their lives on the line about what we are trying to achieve and what our goals are. It changes on any given day with the present government, while the previous government honestly did not know what it was up to.

Does the Liberal Party now have a clear position about what we are doing in Afghanistan, what success is and what we are going to do, not after we consult and talk to someone else but what its position is as a party?

• (1345)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see that the member endorses my comments with regard to the fact that the government has continually not had a very clear position.

Our position is very clear. Again, in the Leader of the Opposition's speech of February 2007, we have said that we support the mission but we also said that it is an international mission. It is not a clearly Canadian mission and, therefore, in terms of the rotation, which has never come out of the mouth of the government, it needs to have someone lined up, as we did before when we were in Kabul and we had Turkey lined up. The government has not done anything about that.

Business of Supply

We have been very clear in our objectives. We support development and we support the enhancement of young women and children going to school. We support diplomatic efforts and we support our troops 100% in the field. However, at the end of the day, we are not expected to be there and it is not realistic to suggest that we will be there, in terms of Kandahar, beyond 2009. We need to know what the government is going to do. As it is the government, it needs to answer that.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

I want to recognize my fellow citizens from La Pointe-de-l'Île and say that there is a military base in this riding which sends out all sorts of things, including unfortunately the coffins used in Afghanistan.

I would like to remind the House that the government forced a debate, making it impossible to ask the questions and get the answers we needed. The result was that the deployment was extended until 2009, although the motion only passed by a margin of five votes. The government took the House hostage. Now we find ourselves in a situation that might have been better if parliamentarians had been consulted. Instead, this deployment was forced on us until 2009. I am not saying that we would have been against it, but we could at least have discussed how to go about it.

This mission is not Canada's only mission. There are 2,500 soldiers in Kandahar as opposed to 37,500 in all of Afghanistan, if my figures are correct.

However, the mission in Kandahar, which is specific to Canada, is proving very difficult. The Bloc Québécois supports the Liberal motion to inform our allies and colleagues that the Canadians will withdraw from this mission in February 2009. Canadian combat operations in southern Afghanistan will cease in February 2009.

In the short amount of time available to me, I would particularly like to say that Canada has ascribed far too much importance to the military mission in comparison with the humanitarian mission and reconstruction. Why do I remind the House of this? Because this is not an ordinary war. Especially in Kandahar, it is a war against guerrillas. Guerrillas do not have tanks or the same weapons. Guerrillas cannot keep going without support from the local population, and that is why it is important to remember that Afghans must receive support and see the kind of reconstruction that will give them hope.

Why do I say this? Because we have been getting signals. For some time now, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has been hearing from witnesses. Nearly all of them, apart from those in the army, have been telling us that the Afghans are losing hope.

Why? There are many reasons. A professor from Carleton University reminded us of them this morning. They are losing hope because the democracy and freedoms they were promised are in serious jeopardy and because corruption is widespread, as it was previously when the Taliban came to Afghanistan.

We must remember history. The Taliban were driven out by the American army, by the Canadians and others. The Taliban were able to enter Afghanistan because of the corruption of the warlords.

There was the poverty of most people and the wealth of a few. Why the difference? It is related to this corruption, which is based on the poor distribution of the money that is being sent, for all the reasons with which we are very familiar.

• (1350)

This money passes through the hands of many racketeers, so that fewer projects are actually carried out and less money really gets to the Afghans.

Then there are drugs. We must not forget that right now Afghanistan produces 90% of the world's opium. This is an extraordinary source of funding for the Taliban and once more a source of corruption. Let me say in passing that these Taliban are capable of paying the soldiers trained by the Canadian army and the other armies much more than they are paid by the Afghan army. I heard this said in a Canadian embassy by a military official who was there.

Freedom of expression and the press is now threatened and jeopardized by the government because Canada is too dependent on the warlords—at the time of the American invasion, the warlords controlled only 3% of the territory. It is because of drugs, opium, but also because farmers make money, though not much, from growing poppies. Twelve percent of the population are involved in growing poppies. So, if we try to eradicate this crop, as we are doing right now, the farmers will once again be forced into the arms of the Taliban.

So something else must be done and other means found. The Bloc has suggested using this drug, buying it and using it for medicinal purposes. It is extremely important to know that something else must be done. A senior official from the United Nations even said that it would be better to buy it up than to let it corrupt the whole system in Afghanistan.

Another extremely important question is the lack of coordination among all those who wish to do humanitarian work—including Canadians and the Afghan government—and those who perform security-related work.

Next winter, when the troops and leaders at various levels are less busy, some thought should be given to transforming what the PRTs, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, do. The soldiers are not trained to do humanitarian or reconstruction work. According to some recent reports, their efforts in these areas meet with failure and give rise to successive problems. Humanitarian workers could therefore do their work under the protection of the military, but we must not continue with the PRTs.

So there is a lot to do in order to restore hope to the Afghans. All we have to do is restore their hope. It is true that security is necessary and soldiers are needed, but soldiers are not the goal sought and are not even the primary means. The primary means is to restore hope to the Afghans.

Statements by Members

To achieve this, Canada must not be afraid to insist that it is time to put an end to the corruption. This message must also be aimed at the Karzai government. It is up to him to do some housecleaning to ensure that the Taliban who are still being supported by the Afghan people cannot return this time, like they did the first time.

Finally, Canada must have the courage to take a very firm stand. Today, we heard some very shocking and strong evidence about President Musharraf. Pakistan is training, arming and instructing the Taliban. We cannot let this situation continue.

Thus, much remains to be done. The Bloc Québécois supports the soldiers working there. However, for the sake of their health and their lives, we are saying that the military should focus its efforts on construction and humanitarian assistance.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member and I are on the foreign affairs committee. In her speech she has highlighted a lot of the challenges that are being faced in development in Afghanistan. We have heard our witnesses tell us about the challenges. I agree with her that the challenges are there and must be addressed.

What is really confusing is what is coming from the Liberals. Their last speaker just said that we have 25 partners in CIDA and that Canada is not giving enough aid to Afghanistan. Let me tell him that Afghanistan is the number one country where Canada is committed to giving international aid.

As a matter of fact, Canada is giving \$1 billion over the next 10 years for development projects in Afghanistan. For him to stand up and say that CIDA's budget is for 25 countries and that somehow we have missed Afghanistan is totally misleading.

Another point is that the Liberals have said that there are no new goals or there are ambiguous goals in Afghanistan. All I want to say is this: look at the Afghanistan Compact. The compact gives a complete picture of what should be achieved in Afghanistan and that is what—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I would have liked my colleague opposite to ask me a question. Since he did not, I will take this opportunity to emphasize the urgency of learning from past mistakes and not repeating them. These mistakes include believing that we can allow corruption to continue without any repercussions, and believing that the Taliban will only be defeated by guns and tanks. The Taliban will be defeated if the Afghan people believe that, with time, they will discover hope once again, rebuild a democratic country and regain their freedom. The Afghan people have a history and a culture and they want to find their way back to it. That is what must not be forgotten.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île for her excellent presentation.

I would like to talk about reconstruction. I would like to ask her what she heard. As an aside, you may have noticed that my colleague and others in favour of withdrawal have always been very calm and attentive whereas those on the government side are incredibly aggressive.

I would like to ask my colleague if she feels that reconstruction is part of—

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I can only allow the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île 30 seconds to answer. Now, only 20 seconds remain.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, reconstruction also means the reconstruction of what the Afghans need to have an economy that does not rely on the drug culture. Yes, schools, because—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We will now move on to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

YOUTH EXCHANGES CANADA

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, 18 first-year students and two teachers from Saint-Pierre secondary school in my riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles are flying to British Columbia as part of the Youth Exchanges Canada program put on by the Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada.

The exchange is between the Saint-Pierre school in Charlesbourg and the Ross Road school in North Vancouver, where there is a French immersion program. The students are well prepared for their trip and are in contact with their counterparts in British Columbia.

The students from North Vancouver came to Quebec City in the winter and enjoyed the hospitality they received from the Quebecers, who hosted them for a week during Quebec City's winter carnival period. Now it is time for the students from Charlesbourg to spend a week with them from April 20 to 27.

I want to wish them a very good trip. I am sure the experience will be very rewarding for them because they will get the chance to see another side of life in Canada and to discover just how vast their country is.

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SAINT-QUENTIN ARC-EN-CIEL CHOIR

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 6, I had the honour of attending a concert by the Saint-Quentin Arc-en-ciel choir at the Maple Capital of Atlantic Canada Festival.

After an 18-year hiatus, the Arc-en-ciel choir made a comeback with a retro show that was sold out for three days. The 40 or so artists impressed the audience by playing old French and English hits.

Statements by Members

I would like to congratulate Louiselle Connors, the concert producer, and all the artists who put on such a moving and lively show. I also want to thank Jocelyne Bossé Querry and the entire organizing committee of the Maple Capital Festival, who presented me with a bird's-eye maple tie that I am proudly wearing today.

The Festival organizing committee and the Arc-en-ciel choir made this event a success throughout the entire region.

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ROGER GIBB

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we recently learned that Roger Gibb has been appointed Chair of the Board of Directors of the Saint-Jérôme regional hospital foundation.

Mr. Gibb is an engineer who retired from Stalex Canada, where he was vice-president and CEO, and he is very involved in the Blainville community. He is a leader in the eyes of many of our entrepreneurs, who benefit from his advice, his ability to organize, and his availability. He was the former chair and then governor of the Thérèse-de-Blainville chamber of commerce, former president of the economic development corporation and vice-president of the Blainville business people's association. He is now the president of Quebec's environmental industry association.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I wish him the best of luck in carrying out his mandate as chair of the Saint-Jérôme hospital foundation.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Sunday is the 37th Earth Day. Sadly, we are still facing an environmental crisis in Canada and around the world.

Since taking office, the Conservatives have embarrassed and disappointed Canadians by their position on the environment. One of their first acts in government was to give up on Canada's international commitments to address climate change and global warming.

Quite simply, ordinary Canadians are tired of this inaction. They know that this is not only a health issue for their families and future generations but the beginning of a serious economic problem for all Canadians.

New Democrats are fighting hard to ensure that Kyoto remains a priority for the Conservative government.

By helping to completely rewrite the clean air act, we now have the opportunity to pass legislation that would significantly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions with tough regulations on big polluters, an end to subsidies for oil and gas, a green car strategy and energy efficiency programs.

The government has to get the message. We need to protect our environment.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SETTLEMENT

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 21, 2007, the Indian residential schools settlement agreement received final court approval. Now former students and their families must choose whether to stay in the agreement or opt out. Significant plans are under way to inform all former students and their families about their options and legal rights.

During this period, efforts will be made to ensure that all former students receive important information about the details of the settlement agreement and the timelines and procedures involved in exercising their legal rights.

To this end, a summary notice, detailed notice and opt-out form will be mailed directly at the program's outset to over 40,000 former students across Canada. These notices describe the settlement's benefits and explain what it means to opt out and how to do so.

It is important to note that these notices are part of a larger program, which will include media placements, direct mailings, community outreach activities and continued availability of a toll free information line and website.

This government is once again demonstrating its commitment to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools.

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● (1405)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members will know, we are celebrating Earth Week. It is especially important to recognize environmental activists across the nation.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize a very talented young lady by the name of Megan Paavola, a constituent who is among an elite group of 15 students from across Canada, who will receive the \$5,000 Toyota Earth Day scholarship. This award recognizes outstanding achievements in environmental community service, academics and extracurricular participation.

Ms. Paavola's motivation and dedication to raise awareness on environmental issues has been most impressive. Her efforts include, but are not limited to: co-organizing a two-day Polar Bear Awareness event at the Winnipeg Children's Museum; participating in the Polar Bear Science Leadership Camp in Churchill, Manitoba; speaking tirelessly on ecological solutions; and initiating a student run recycling program at her school.

Statements by Members

Megan Paavola's passion for the arts and social justice issues, combined with her leadership skills, make her a well rounded individual.

Please join me in congratulating Megan Paavola who understands the true meaning of being a responsible global citizen.

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AIR FORCE APPRECIATION DAY

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Air Force Appreciation Day, an occasion to recognize the outstanding contributions made by the men and women of Canada's air force to protect all Canadians.

The 15,000 men and women in air force light blue are on duty every day, ensuring the sovereignty of our airspace over Canada's great land mass and well out over three oceans.

The air force conducts dangerous search and rescue missions. It forms Canada's contribution to Norad's continental defence. It transports humanitarian assistance to those in need around the world and it plays a vital role in the Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan as it maintains the crucial air bridge to that operation, transporting thousands of tonnes of equipment and thousands of personnel.

From Billy Bishop's courage of the early morning in a Nieuport 17 to a C-17 Globemaster in the near future, Canada's air force slips the surly bonds of earth around the clock as a vital component of Canada's foreign and domestic policy.

Today I would like all members to join me in recognizing the dedication and importance of Canada's air force whose leadership joins us today and its hard-working men and women who serve Canada first, every day.

Per ardua ad astra and Check-Six.

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[Translation]

EARTH DAY

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with Earth Day celebrations approaching, I would invite all members of this House to reflect on our ability to act on environmental issues. We each have a role to play here in the House, as well as in our lives. What can we do to act responsibly?

First, we have to become more aware of how our lifestyle and consumer choices affect the environment. Once we do that, it will be easier to change things. We can make so many little changes: reduce our energy consumption, avoid using plastic bags, dispose of hazardous household waste properly, or plant trees.

The Conservative government is refusing to shoulder its responsibilities in the fight against climate change. My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I condemn this government's attitude. We must each make the kinds of changes that will really make a difference.

[English]

AHEPA CANADA

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today to recognize AHEPA Canada.

Founded in the United States in 1922, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association is one of the largest Hellenic heritage groups in the world and branched out to Canada in 1928. AHEPA is also in Greece, Cyprus, New Zealand and Australia.

AHEPA promotes the ideals of Hellenism, education, philanthropy, civic responsibility, family and individual excellence. In Canada, the organization donates more than \$300,000 a year toward education and charities at the local, national and international levels.

I would like to thank the president of AHEPA Canada, Mr. Frank Antoniou and the members of his executive for honouring us with their presence in Ottawa today.

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● (1410)

SIKHISM

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sikh communities around the world are celebrating the 308th birthday of the Sikh nation, the Sikh faith, the Khalsa. It also marks the first day of the Sikh new year.

Since 1994, I have held celebrations for Vaisakhi. I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for attending the celebration along with many other members of parliament. Mr. Speaker, a special thanks to you for your continued Vaisakhi celebration support.

Hundreds of thousands of Sikhs live as peaceful and full participants in Canadian society. In spite of many difficulties encountered by Canada's first Sikh immigrants at the turn of the century, today they are a full and active community in the Canadian mosaic.

As the first turbaned Sikh member of Parliament of the House of Commons, I am sure all members would like to join with me in congratulating the Sikh community on this occasion and hope that we all continue to work together to promote harmony and good will in order to keep Canada an exemplary country filled with tolerance and compassion.

* * *

BRENT POLAND

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honour my constituent, Corporal Brent Poland, who was among the six soldiers killed on Easter Sunday in Afghanistan. He is the second combat casualty from Sarnia—Lambton from this mission after last year's tragic death of Private William Cushley.

They represent the first combat deaths for Sarnia—Lambton since the Korean war, where Canadians gave hope to, in those days, the poorest people on earth. Now Canadians are giving hope to today's most downtrodden in Afghanistan.

Statements by Members

I had the honour to speak with Corporal Poland before he was deployed and he told me he joined the forces because he was inspired by what they were achieving and, above all else, he believed in this mission.

The Poland family members have stated that they do not want their son's death to be the cause of any wavering will or political opportunism concerning the worthiness of the mission in Afghanistan.

My sincere condolences go to Don and Pat, brother Mark and all other family and friends.

* * *

TRADE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently North American automakers came out against the proposed free trade deal with South Korea. This follows the Canadian Auto Workers Union that earlier voiced its opposition as well. In fact, a credible economic study predicts a deal with Korea will cost between 14,000 and 33,000 well paying jobs in this country.

The auto industry used to be a backbone of our economy. Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have allowed it to disintegrate.

The statistics are grave. In the last two years we have lost over 200,000 jobs in manufacturing in Ontario and Quebec. In my region of Windsor-Essex alone, more than 10,000 auto sector jobs have disappeared and for the first time in 18 years Canada has an auto trade deficit.

Despite these job losses and devastating implications of the trade deal, the government has signalled its intention to fast track negotiations without any public debate or impact studies.

If this Conservative government is unwilling to end free trade, it must bring that deal to the House for a vote.

* * *

HEARING IMPAIRED

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a parent based community organization that has made a difference not only in my riding but in 17 other chapters across Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec and Newfoundland.

VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children was established in the 1960s by parents to offer support to families with children who are deaf and hard of hearing. VOICE has made a difference in the lives of hearing impaired children by providing parental support, public education, advocacy and auditory-verbal therapy.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Halton chapter of VOICE which, because of volunteerism, was able to raise over \$40,000 to ensure that hearing impaired children in my region have the opportunity to develop their ability to listen and to speak.

The website, for more information, is www.voicefordeafkids.com.

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, through their quiet, unwavering solidarity and generosity, thousands of women and men in my riding and throughout Quebec are helping improve the quality of life of people in our community.

Volunteer work has quietly taken hold and has given our society a more human face. Each year, thousands of volunteers in Quebec give their time and talent to their favourite cause.

Last September, the Conservative government attacked the weakest, most vulnerable members of our society by slashing support programs. Its actions had a direct impact on the volunteers who humanize our society.

As this is National Volunteer Week, I want to thank and pay tribute to all the people who selflessly devote time to bettering our communities.

* * *

● (1415)

[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call on all parliamentarians to join me in condemning all forms of hate speech. Unfortunately, occasionally we see hate and intolerance rear its ugly head among us.

On April 4 a small explosion outside a Jewish community centre in Montreal sent a chill as many Canadians celebrated Passover. Last week Professor Muriel Walker of McMaster University had hateful and racist slurs painted on her office door because she promoted understanding about Muslim Canadians. These acts of cowardice and hate disgust all Canadians.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the charter, I am proud that our laws and institutions stand firm against hate. Today my colleague from Etobicoke Centre will be tabling a motion to strengthen our hate laws by adding gender as an unacceptable basis for discrimination and hate.

I am calling on all parliamentarians to offer their unanimous consent to adopt this motion. Last Parliament some Conservative members refused to do so and I hope this time they will reconsider. We all must stand together against all forms of hate.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

BRIAN MULRONEY

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I witnessed a wonderful moment in Canadian history, as the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney was awarded the Order of King Yaroslav the Wise, the highest honour the Ukrainian government can bestow. At the same time, he also accepted the Shevchenko Medal, the most prestigious honour awarded by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. Former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker was the first recipient of this honour in 1961.

As the Prime Minister said at the event, “[Fifteen years ago] under Mr. Mulroney's leadership Canada was the first country in the west to recognize Ukrainian independence”. For that fledgling nation, for the 1.2 million Canadians of Ukrainian origin and for all freedom-loving people, it was a great moment.

Our country has been shaped by waves of immigration that have enhanced its vitality and reputation. More than ever, Canada must continue to welcome immigrants in order to remain prosperous and defend freedom here and elsewhere in the world.

Mr. Mulroney, ardent defender of freedom, we congratulate you on this important honour and thank you for making us so proud to be Canadian.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our soldiers in Afghanistan are engaged in a dangerous mission in dangerous conditions. Their courage does honour to our country, and all the members of this House stand firmly behind them. But our troops and all Canadians have the right to demand clarity from the government regarding the mission.

Will the Prime Minister promise to end our combat mission in Kandahar in February 2009 and notify NATO immediately?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, NATO is not asking for our decision right now. The Leader of the Opposition keeps on changing his position. In October, he said he supported the mission, because he was convinced that most of the people of Afghanistan wanted our protection.

They still want our protection, and we will continue to provide that protection.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said until February 2009.

[English]

But what the Prime Minister said is that he would continue our combat mission until at least 2011, and that we would stay until the progress made is irreversible, and that we might leave by 2010 “if certain conditions are met”, which is exactly what President Bush said about his war in Iraq, where the Prime Minister wanted to send Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister end our mission in Kandahar in February 2009 and inform NATO now?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the mission in Afghanistan, unlike Iraq, is supported by the entire international community. NATO is not asking us for a decision today.

I note that the Leader of the Opposition has had about a half dozen different positions on this over the last year. One day he is for it, then he is against it, he wants to leave now, he wants to leave later, and he wants to stay.

He said this: “I'm supporting the mission because I'm still convinced that most of the people of Afghanistan want our protection”.

They still want our protection. What has changed to cause the Leader of the Opposition to change his story yet again?

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have not changed my position. I said until February 2009. I believe that our allies and the Afghan government need clarity from our government. Canadians do as well. They expect the mission to end in February 2009. The government has said that it has ordered tanks and helicopters worth billions of dollars for the Kandahar mission, and this equipment will not be delivered until shortly before February 2009.

Is this a poor procurement decision, or is it a sign that the Prime Minister has already decided to extend the combat mission?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are making military purchases for the long-term rebuilding of our Canadian Forces. These purchases are not linked to the mission in Afghanistan; the government has made a decision to rebuild our country's military pride.

[English]

Also, I have to say this. We did not hear a lot about this in the last few months because Canadian troops had not suffered casualties. We see some unfortunate casualties and those members are back to attacking the mission. The Leader of the Opposition likes to talk about what is unfair. That is unfair to the men and women in uniform.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we indignantly reject the idea that we are concerned about this because of casualties. We are concerned about this because we want our citizens to be properly informed.

It is not too much to ask the government to replace ambiguity with clarity. It is not too much to ask the government to replace rhetoric with honesty.

It is not too much to expect a defence minister and a Prime Minister to have one clear position, which is whether they will commit today to end the combat mission in Kandahar in February 2009. It is a straight question. Let us have a straight answer.

Oral Questions

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in Kandahar the men and women of the Canadian Forces are doing us proud. They are protecting the Afghan people. We will stand by them and we will provide whatever equipment they need to do the job.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in February 2009, Canada will have been in Afghanistan for seven years. We will have served in a combat role in the most dangerous part of the country for three years. This will have been one of the longest combat missions Canada has ever engaged in.

Will the government promise today to honour the February 2009 date, which the government itself set for the end of our combat operations in southern Afghanistan?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in the Panjwai and Zari districts life is returning to normal. Families are returning by the thousands because the Canadian Forces are providing security. They are training the army, they are delivering aid, and they are making life better for Afghans. It is what the Afghan government wants.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment would have us believe that enforcing the Kyoto protocol would bring the apocalypse upon us. The minister must know, rather, that it is the manufacturing industry in Quebec that will suffer financially if no absolute targets are set. France, for example, plans to levy a green tax on all products from countries that have not set absolute targets.

Does the Prime Minister realize that, by refusing to establish absolute targets, he is showing favouritism for western oil companies, which will continue to turn a profit while polluting, and damaging the manufacturing sector, which will pay a heavy price?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the targets that this government will set for industry will apply to all industries in Canada. For the first time, we will have national, mandatory targets.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his report, the Minister of the Environment refuses to acknowledge that, without absolute targets—and I mean absolute targets, not intensity targets—it is the manufacturing sector that will be penalized, an industry that is very important in Quebec.

Does the Prime Minister realize that, if he wants the manufacturing sector to remain competitive, he must immediately establish absolute targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases in accordance with the Kyoto protocol?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's policy is obviously different from that of the other parties of this House. Our policy is to achieve real

reductions in greenhouse gases and other air pollutants, while preserving jobs and ensuring the health of the Canadian economy.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in order to put in place a carbon exchange, the government must set absolute greenhouse gas reduction targets.

Is there no one in this government who understands that in the interest of all Canadian industry it is essential that those who pollute assume the consequences and that those who pollute pay to clean up the damage to the environment?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already said that, for the first time, we are creating a regulatory framework for industry. It is very interesting to see that the Bloc Québécois has the answer to every government problem and mistake. For 13 long years it did absolutely nothing for our environment. It is now time for this government to take action and we are doing just that.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is because of the government and not the Bloc Québécois that the environmental cause has lost ground. A carbon exchange to implement the Kyoto protocol is a definite advantage for the Quebec manufacturing sector, which has already implemented substantial restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions.

Will the government finally listen to the many Quebec companies, including Cascades and Alcan, that are calling for a carbon exchange and will it stop deliberately ignoring this solution, which presents a real economic advantage for Quebec and Canadian industries?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that the Bloc member did not ask these questions before supporting the Liberal bill that called on the government to provide the real figures and real results.

It is pointless for Bloc members to not do their homework and vote for something without being aware of the real consequences of their actions. This government is taking action and establishing one of the best plans in the world to really reduce greenhouse gases and to improve air quality. That is our goal.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, six months ago I called upon the Prime Minister to send his doomed clean air act to a special committee where all parties could participate and where every party could put forward its best ideas on how we could address the crisis of climate change. He agreed to do so.

Now that committee has finished its work. Every party has some of their ideas contained in that legislation.

My question is very simple. The future of this issue is in the hands of the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister table the bill before the House? When will he do it so we can debate, amend and vote on the clean air act, Bill C-30? When will he do it?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before on numerous occasions, this government intends to bring forward the first full, complete, compulsory national regulation of greenhouse gases and air pollutants in Canada.

Oral Questions

We will be doing that very shortly. This government will proceed in a way that will result in real reductions and will not harm the Canadian economy.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has to stop hiding behind bogus, irresponsible and incomplete reports that purport to suggest it is either jobs and the economy on the one hand or the environment on the other. That is simply wrong.

The greatest threat to our economy is the climate change crisis and it is time the Prime Minister understood it. Has he got the guts to bring Bill C-30, which was built by all parties of the House, before the House, and when will he do it?

If he has targets, let him bring them to the House so we can debate them and adopt them or change them. Will he have the courage to—

• (1430)

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the real issue here is whether any of the opposition parties has the guts to face reality. The reality is this: we cannot reduce greenhouse gas emissions by one-third in less than four years and have a positive effect for the Canadian economy.

We will bring forward a plan that will result in real reductions in a reasonable timeframe, and it will result in long term growth for the Canadian economy. This party has no intention of doing anything that is going to destroy Canadian jobs or damage the health of this economy.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Anthony Ianiero deserves to know who killed his parents. Dr. Cheryl Everall and Kimberley Kim deserve to be cleared of the ludicrous Mexican charge that they are prime suspects in that heinous crime.

They are here today, trying yet again to get a little bit of help from the government. Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs finally stand up for these Canadians and submit today a formal diplomatic protest with Mexican government officials over the botched Ianiero murder investigation and the framing of these two very innocent Canadian citizens?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have done better than that. I have voiced our concerns directly to the President of Mexico. I have spoken directly to my counterpart, the Secretary of State for Mexico.

We have had ongoing dialogue. We have had ongoing contact with Mexican officials, within hours of the murder being discovered, and we will continue to do so.

I spoke with Mr. Ianiero shortly after this tragic event occurred to express the sympathies and the support of the Canadian government. I have met with the two individuals who, by all accounts, have been wrongfully accused. We will continue to work to the best of our ability to assist Mexican officials to find the perpetrators.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): I take it, Mr. Speaker, that this is a brush-off of our government and our foreign minister by the Mexican authorities.

[*Translation*]

We can see the results the minister gets in consular cases.

Justice has not been served in the case of the Ianiero family. Dr. Everall and Ms. Kim continue to be identified as hired killers.

Huseyin Celil has still been given a life sentence in China. In addition, an innocent individual by the name of Brenda Martin is languishing in a Mexican prison.

[*English*]

Let me make it clear. Will the minister now inform Mexico that Canada wants Cheryl Everall and Kimberley Kim exonerated and that we believe the Ianiero murder investigation was indeed a complete farce?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I have indicated is that of course we will continue to do everything in our ability to assist in catching the perpetrators of this heinous crime.

What is very interesting is that the member opposite is the same member who went off half-cocked, without facts, desperately chasing a headline, as he always does, when he said this within days of the murder:

If the Mexican theory is correct, there are two murderers back in Canada and their trails are getting colder the longer the RCMP fails to act. It doesn't constitute interference in my experience. It requires the government to discharge its responsibility to investigate what may be a question of domestic security.

It is that kind of torqued rhetoric from the member opposite that does not help.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in March the government closed—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I would urge the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East and some of his colleagues on the other side to carry on their argument outside so the rest of us can proceed with question period.

The hon. member for Richmond Hill now has the floor.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, in March the government closed Canadian consulates in Italy, Russia and Japan. Now 19 more Canadian diplomatic offices are rumoured to be on the chopping block.

Would the minister explain how these closures during a time of massive surpluses will enhance Canada's diplomatic activity, and did his deputy minister explicitly recommend the closures or was this the minister's idea?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the key word in the member's question was "rumour". More quidnuncs from the Liberal Party.

Oral Questions

What we have done is what previous governments have done. In fact the member opposite would know that during his time in government, the 13 years, the Liberals closed 31 missions abroad.

We are doing what all governments should do, reviewing the places where we could have the most important strategic presence, and we will make ongoing assessments as time goes by.

• (1435)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. minister that in fact when we closed consulates, we had inherited a \$42.5 billion deficit and we then repaired the problem.

These closures are symbolic of how badly the government misunderstands foreign policy.

Could the minister tell this House why his government continues to downgrade Canada's relationship with countries around the world? Is it because the government lacks a vision and an understanding about Canada's role in the international community, or is it because the government just does not care about how we are perceived internationally?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, without going back to the time of Sir John A., I could remind the member opposite that it was a Conservative government that inherited a \$38 billion deficit.

It is interesting to get a history lesson from the member opposite, the member whose government was very much involved in the difficulties suffered by Mr. Arar and Mr. Sampson, so we take no lessons from the member opposite on consular cases or the closure of consular offices.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BENAMER BENATTA

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Benamer Benatta, an Algerian national seeking refugee status, spent nearly five years in a prison in the United States after being handed over without cause following the events of September 11, 2001.

How can the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration justify these actions, which look very much like racial profiling, on the part of the Canadian government?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2001, under the Liberal regime, the man in question was deported to the United States. Now, he is asking for an appeal, and that is exactly what we are going to give him.

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, even though the FBI cleared him of all terrorist links three months after he was incarcerated, this man spent 58 months in prison for no reason, trapped in a maze of procedures that have been severely criticized by human rights defence organizations and a United Nations committee.

How can the government justify Canada's flagrant failure to comply with UN agreements on the rights of refugees?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague said, it is true that three months after he

arrived in the United States, he requested an appeal, but we were not the government at the time. I do not know why there was no appeal, but there will be one. We want to know why this happened.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the softwood lumber agreement, the Minister of International Trade has to reassure the forestry industry of Quebec because we have learned that the U.S. representative thinks that the Canadian softwood lumber industry is being subsidized.

Since the provinces had to consult the minister before implementing their programs, how can the minister explain that the United States is concerned that eight of the programs in Quebec went beyond what is allowed under the agreement?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the government is being asked about this agreement because it is a source of pride to us. Why are we proud? Because this is an agreement that meets the needs of the industry in Quebec and that also satisfies Quebec's unions.

More importantly, this agreement provides for negotiation and discussion between the governments. That is what we are doing in the interest of all Canadians.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the negotiations. At the time of the negotiations, did the Minister of International Trade provide guarantees to Quebec and the provinces that the existing programs were compliant with the agreement that he was about to sign with the U.S.?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that the agreement signed under the leadership of the Prime Minister was backed by Quebec.

The Government of Quebec is behind us, Quebecers are behind us and the forestry industry is behind us. I do not understand the opposition and criticism from the Bloc Québécois. The Bloc Québécois seems to be bored in the House of Commons. One might wonder what its purpose is here.

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is meeting with U.S. representatives today to discuss Canadian forestry policies. Once again the U.S. is challenging Canadian forestry programs, including those of Ontario and Quebec, under the softwood lumber agreement. This has other provinces with a strong lumber industry, such as British Columbia, worried.

When will the government stop bowing to U.S. interests and really stand up for Canada, as the Conservatives promised?

Oral Questions

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is this new government that is indeed standing up for the softwood lumber industry. If it were not for this government, we would not have a softwood lumber agreement that provides us an avenue to consult. We would be back in litigation. Is that what the Liberals would have us do, 20 more years of litigation?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a joke. The government signed such a bad deal that not only did it leave \$1 billion in the U.S., but today our softwood producers are actually paying more in export taxes under this deal than if the deal had never been signed. Now the U.S. lumber lobby wants these excessive taxes increased even more.

When will the government start making Canadian trade policy in Canada and for Canada, and not in Washington?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed this is no joking matter. We are talking about the livelihoods of Canadian families. It is because of the decision taken by this government that those families are back at work, that the industry is stable, that we have an agreement that is good for seven to nine years, which is not what we had under a Liberal government.

* * *

EQUALIZATION

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 4 Wade Locke, an economist with Memorial University, did a study which showed that Newfoundland and Labrador would gain over \$5 billion in the new budget. However, a week later through an exchange of e-mails Mr. Locke discovered he was given wrong information by the finance minister's office. When he revised the numbers, it turned out Newfoundland and Labrador would actually lose money under the new formula.

Why did the Minister of Finance mislead the work of the independent economist whose goal was only to seek out the truth?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the proposal with respect to Newfoundland and Labrador is clear. There are two equalization programs.

One is the accord that was negotiated by the current premier of Newfoundland with the former Liberal government. That is the same today as it was six months ago, as it was a year ago, and it will be the same a year from now. The government of Newfoundland and Labrador can choose to go ahead with that agreement.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: That is not true.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Relax, Ralph, I am going to explain this.

The second is the O'Brien formula and the government of Newfoundland and Labrador has the choice of going that route—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister should relax while I explain to him an e-mail exchange from his office. It said, and this was in the St. John's *Telegram*:

I have apologized to Wade that a previous e-mail from one of our staff may have misled him.

That was from his office. The minister is responsible for a great deal of misinformation. Remember income trusts? Remember interest deductibility?

The premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, Danny Williams, has called for the minister's resignation. Will he stand in the House and respond to the premier's request?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suggested to the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador the last time that perhaps we could have a hockey game together so we could settle it. He would have to pay for his own jerseys, of course, if we were going to do that.

There is an important choice for the government of Newfoundland and Labrador. It can either go ahead with the Atlantic accord, which is the same as it has been since it was negotiated by the current premier, or it can go the route of the new equalization formula. That is a choice for Newfoundland and Labrador.

The reason this is necessary, of course, is that the premiers themselves could not come to an agreement with respect to equalization, so it was incumbent on the federal government to do that.

* * *

• (1445)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today China's official news agency is reporting that Huseyin Celil has been sentenced to life in prison and the deprivation of all political rights, as well as a second sentence of a further 10 years in prison.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs inform the House of the government's reaction to this news?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, members of the government and I were deeply disappointed to hear the news this morning with respect to the verdict and the sentence of Mr. Celil. I spoke with his wife Kamila to express those sympathies as well as our ongoing support and commitment on this case.

Chinese authorities have persistently refused to respond to our concerns with respect to this Canadian citizen. In addition, there are concerns for Mr. Celil's health and his well-being. I immediately called in the Chinese chargé d'affaires this morning to speak with him and I expressed these views and Canada's ongoing interest in this case.

We believe that China has not lived up to the Canada-China consular agreement. We will conduct a thorough review to determine whether this remains an effective way to safeguard Canada-China citizens travelling and passports. I will be raising this matter next week in China.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the second time today the competence of that minister has been called into question.

Oral Questions

Mr. Celil has been in jail for over a year on unspecified charges. Canadian officials have not even been able to speak to him to this point in time, and now we hear the government is taking this kind of action which should have been taken ages ago.

Just yesterday I received a message from a minister that said Mr. Celil had received a nine year sentence. It is clear that hardly anybody knows what is going on in the government.

I am pleased to hear that the—

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): I will leave it to others, Mr. Speaker, to determine who knows what is going on.

We have been involved in this serious case from the moment we first learned that Mr. Celil had gone through Uzbekistan back to China and has been in custody. We have made persistent attempts to see him through consular officials. We have had members of the consul in Urumqi following this case.

We continue to represent his interests there to the best of our ability, to make representations through the Chinese government, to have access to Mr. Celil, to provide support for his wife and family here in Canada. We continue to do so.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I recall, it started with the Prime Minister making his comments on human rights on an airplane going to the South Asia conference which did nothing to help that individual.

The government has done nothing over the year to secure a fair trial for that individual or legal representation. The government has done nothing to keep him safe from torture, which we know happens in Chinese jails.

Beyond a much needed apology, what is the government going to do beyond today?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member displays a stunning lack of depth of understanding of the justice system in China if that is his submission.

I have just outlined in detail what we have done and continue to do. There are ongoing representations on behalf of Mr. Celil. We are working in every possible way to provide him with consular support.

This is a very tragic case, one that has gained great prominence and is representative of the ongoing human rights problems that exist in the People's Republic of China.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the Senate this morning the Minister of the Environment brazenly attempted to scare Canadians into thinking that there will be dire consequences if we fulfill our Kyoto commitments. He presented a report full of misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, ridiculous assumptions and glaring omissions.

Can the minister explain to Canadians why he commissioned a report that deliberately deceives the Canadian people on the impact of meeting our Kyoto obligations?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party asked us, through Bill C-288, to present a plan to implement Kyoto because it did not have its own plan. The Liberal Party needs to be honest with Canadians.

I know someone who is being honest. I will read a letter we recently received. It says:

I would like to begin by congratulating you on the important steps you have taken to address climate change by supporting provincial efforts through the ecoTrust Fund and through your financial support of public transit initiatives.

Does the member know who sent this letter? It was someone named D. McGuinty, the Liberal member for Ottawa South.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1450)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over a decade, the Prime Minister and his right-wing, extremist supporters have been exaggerating the economic impact of taking action on climate change.

When talking about taking action on acid rain the following is what the Prime Minister had to say. He said:

The alarmists said this would bring about a terrible recession.

Quite the contrary, the North American economy thrived, posting one of the longest and strongest periods of growth in history.

Is the Minister of the Environment now the government's chief alarmist? I would ask Chicken Little: Is the sky falling?

The Speaker: I am not sure whether I am Chicken Little or the Minister of the Environment is the one being referred to.

The hon. Minister of the Environment has the floor.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member said, "when Canadians see the cost of Kyoto they will scream".

Let us look at what one of the former Liberal ministers of the environment, Sheila Copps, said. She said, "On the environment, the Liberals are not on solid ground". She also said, "People like Ralph Goodale and Anne McLellan were viciously against Kyoto".

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I would urge all hon. members, and particularly the Minister of the Environment, to avoid using members' names. The person may have said that but the member knows that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. I think the member meant the hon. member for Wascana and he should use those kinds of terms in addressing the House.

The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was a difficult day for the Minister of the Environment, who appeared before the Senate committee with only one thing in mind: spreading fear among Canadians.

Except that when he brought out an incomplete report based on partial information, he instead discredited himself before the members of the committee, and before all Canadians. When he was asked for specific figures to justify at least one of his dire predictions, he had nothing to say.

Now that he has had a few hours to read his report, can he give us some explanations or figures that justify at least one of his outlandish conclusions.

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only are we justifying the conclusions of the report, we had a number of Canada's leading economists from outside of government validate it.

I would encourage the member opposite to listen to members of his own caucus. This is what one of his caucus members said two months ago, "We're so far behind now that catch-up is impossible without shutting the country down".

I cannot say who said this but I did see it on a website called www.garth.ca.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he has already been told, he can wear green ties all he wants, but we will no longer trust him, and even less so after this morning.

This morning, he resorted to fear, the weapon of the weak, the weapon used in the fight against acid rain and CFCs. We won those fights and the Canadian economy is still standing.

Fear is always the weapon of the weak, the weapon of those seeking excuses for their lack of action.

I will give him one more chance. He should admit that he was wrong, stop hiring Teletubbies to write his speeches, and learn to tell the truth.

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know members opposite are very fond of telling the truth. One of the members of the Liberal Party, who I think is quite truthful, has said a number of things which I would like to read. He said, "I think our party has got into a mess on the environment". He also said, "We've done all the blah, blah, blah about the environment".

My favourite quote is the one by the deputy leader of the Liberal Party who said, "We just didn't get it done".

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC CITY

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage

said twice that Quebec City's 400th anniversary celebrations committee did not send an invitation to the Queen of England. It is common knowledge. The chair of the committee himself told us he did not invite the Queen. However, he said that the federal government had taken steps for inviting the Queen.

What we want to know from the minister is simple: did the federal government take steps for inviting the Queen to Quebec City's 400th anniversary celebrations or not?

● (1455)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no invitation has been sent to Her Majesty the Queen.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's coastal communities are harshly affected by the crisis in the shrimp industry. Fishers are left to fend for themselves without any assistance or concrete solution from the government, and as a form of protest, they have kept their ships docked. The Bloc Québécois has proposed solutions, namely to reduce fishing fees, stop increasing the global quota and start providing financial assistance for the cost of fuel.

With these options, what is the minister waiting for to take action?

[English]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a couple of days ago I responded to a similar question from the member and I mentioned at the time that we recognized that shrimpers in areas like New Brunswick and Quebec had problems. The New Brunswick fishers are back on the water as are many of them in Quebec.

Newfoundland plans to offer in excess of 50¢ a pound. I understand that it is less than 40¢ in Quebec. Some of the Quebec fishers have now gone to Newfoundland to sell and I understand the processors in Quebec are offering the better price. That is what it is all about.

* * *

FRESHWATER FISH MARKETING CORPORATION

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in November, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced in Gimli, Manitoba that his government would not be introducing dual marketing to the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation. He said, "We need to market ourselves collectively".

However, on Tuesday we learned that the President of the Treasury Board has commissioned a study specifically asking for an assessment of a dual marketing system at the FFMC.

Would the Treasury Board President confirm that this deceitful study has in fact been commissioned despite the minister's promise and whether or not supply management is next on this neo-Conservative government's hit list?

Oral Questions

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some time ago I visited Manitoba and met with the people on the board of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation who are doing a tremendous job. We have no intention of fooling around with the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

What we are doing is ensuring that it has knowledge about every possibility to do better for the people it represents. This is being done in conjunction with it and in no way are we trying to interfere in how it does its business.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this morning, the Minister of the Environment tabled a report with the Senate which said that if the Liberals rammed through their disastrous Bill C-288 environmental plan, the economic impact on Canadian families and businesses, including those in my home riding of Peterborough, would be devastating. I think the Leader of the Opposition should know that families in my riding consider that unfair.

Could the Minister of the Environment tell the House just how the ill-conceived Liberal environmental plan will hurt Canadian families and businesses from coast to coast?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the legislation is a band-aid approach to make up for lost time years later. That is highly unfortunate. Oh, wait a minute, those are not my comments. Those are the comments of the member for Kings—Hants.

The Liberals' plan would cost more than 275,000 jobs in this country. Those are 275,000 people who would not be able to provide for themselves and their families. The cost of filling up a car would jump by 60% and the cost of heating a home by natural gas would almost double. This would be economic disaster for the Canadian economy. We on this side of the House are going to fight for jobs.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Liberal ministers concocted the secret softwood sellout that the Conservative Minister of International Trade took with him when he crossed the floor. Liberal and Conservative members worked hand in hand at the trade committee to force the softwood sellout through and Liberal senators, without any scrutiny whatsoever, adopted the softwood sellout so they could go home for Christmas.

Now the Bush administration is demanding more concessions despite getting over \$1 billion from Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister now admit that it was a bad decision to take on a bad Liberal minister and a bad Liberal deal?

● (1500)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was despite that hon. member that we actually managed to get a softwood agreement in this House that provided jobs and security for the softwood lumber industry. Let us not forget

that British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec were all in agreement, as were the majority of the softwood industries impacted.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec could have no new forestry programs because of the softwood sellout. Five thousand Canadians have lost their jobs since the softwood sellout was put into place. Softwood mill, after softwood mill closes and former chief negotiators from both sides are saying that the deal is a failure and will not last.

As the Prime Minister preens for his image consultant, softwood communities are being destroyed. How many capitulations, concessions and giveaways is he prepared to make to the Bush administration to make this bad deal stay in place?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe I should remind the hon. member that \$5 billion came back to the industries that were hurt so badly by this litigation. If we had not put in place the softwood lumber agreement, we would be back in litigation again. That does not include prevailing jobs for people in the softwood lumber industry. It hurts the communities involved and it hurts the industries themselves.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 12, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced that he would move forward on the conversion of temporary inshore shrimp permits to regular licences in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Considering that Prince Edward Island has a 1,500 metric tonne temporary permit granted in 2000 in area 3-L, will the minister now treat the Island fishing industry the same as his home province and make the temporary permits a permanent allocation? It is a serious issue.

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a slight difference in the comparison that the hon. member makes. First, what we did is made temporary licences to full-time core fishermen permanent. What he is talking about is making permanent the deal that the Liberals did to ensure he kept his seat.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, responding to Mario Dumont last week, the leader of the Liberal Party said that there was no need for new constitutional negotiations. Yesterday, however, he flip-flopped saying that we need full scale constitutional change to reform the Senate.

Points of Order

While the rapid reversal of position is astounding, it is not new. He cannot hold a position on anything for more than a few days. I suspect his real motive is that he wants to block any Senate modernization.

Would the Minister for Democratic Reform tell the House what can be done without a constitutional amendment to strengthen our democracy?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister showed that it is possible to listen to Canadians on who they want to represent them in the Senate. Tomorrow, we will begin debate on a new law to make that part of Canadian democracy.

Conservative governments gave the right to vote to women and to our first nations people, and now, in this the charter week, we will debate giving the right to all Canadians on who they want representing them in the Senate.

The Liberal leader says that constitutional amendments cannot be done and yet he wants constitutional amendments on the Senate. It is not surprising because he seems to like things that he just cannot get done.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. David Hawker, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader would describe for us his plan for the business of the House for the balance of this week and to the end of next week. Specifically, during that timeframe, could he indicate the fate of Bill C-16, dealing with fixed election dates? Will the minister confirm that he has no intention of recalling Bill C-16 for further action in the House during the life of this Parliament.

With respect to Bill C-30, the clean air act, when will that legislation come back to the House of Commons for further consideration? When the Prime Minister announces his new plan with respect to emission targets, will the Prime Minister be acting under the auspices of Bill C-30 or under the existing Canadian Environmental Protection Act?

• (1505)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we will continue with the debate on the opposition motion.

Tomorrow we will begin debate, as I said earlier, on one of the government's bills to modernize the Senate of Canada, Bill C-43. This is an act to provide for consultations with the electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate.

In fact, yesterday the Prime Minister announced that Bert Brown would finally take his seat in the Senate after being elected twice by the people of Alberta. For those who say it cannot be done, we are getting it done. We will continue to get the job done for the other provinces, with the bill, so they too can elect senators. The Senate elections bill, along with the bill to limit terms of senators to eight years will achieve meaningful Senate reform. Meanwhile, we have talked about constitutional reform. We do not think it is necessary. It can be done without it.

However, in response to the other question raised by the opposition House leader on Bill C-16, we will be bringing it forward. We have indicated that we will bring forward a motion to ask that the amendments by the Senate be removed and to communicate that to the Senate. We will bring that motion forward on Monday. We believe we have the support in the House to have that secured so we can have fixed date elections that cannot be tampered with. That will be on the agenda for Monday, followed by Bill C-52, the budget implementation bill. Bill C-43 will be the backup bill on that day. That is the Senate consultations.

Tuesday, April 24 and Thursday, April 26 shall be allotted days.

On Wednesday, we will resume debate on Bill C-52, the budget implementation bill, if it has not been completed Monday. It will be followed by Bill C-40 on sales tax and Bill C-33 on income tax.

Friday, April 27, we will continue with those same finance bills.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place among all parties with respect to Bill C-254, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda), first introduced during the 38th Parliament and reintroduced on May 24, 2006. This bill at long last includes the legal word for "gender" in the definition of what constitutes a hate crime.

I hope to find consent for the following motion: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-254, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda), an act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda), be deemed read a second time, referred to committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-52—BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2007

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond today to the point of order that was raised by the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River concerning Bill C-52, the budget implementation act.

Points of Order

The member argued that clause 13(1) of the bill respecting the application of the definition of “SIFT trust”, which is a specified investment flow-through trust, is not in keeping with the practices and customs of this House. In his view, the provision represents an inappropriate delegation of subordinate law and the member has asked that the Speaker rule that the clause be struck from the bill and the bill ordered reprinted.

As the Speaker has noted, this is a complex issue.

I appreciate the expertise of the member for Scarborough—Rouge River on matters of subordinate law. However, I submit that this is not a valid point of order, as there are no procedural authorities that preclude the House from legislating in this manner. In short, this is a matter for debate, which would be better dealt with by members in the House and at committee, rather than a procedural question for the Speaker to resolve.

Let me first briefly provide some background to this issue in order to assist the Chair.

The provision in question provides a rule for the application of the definition of “SIFT trust”. In particular, the provision sets out when a trust will be subject to the new rules pertaining to the taxation of income trusts.

Under the bill, a new trust will become a SIFT trust and therefore subject to the new rules for the taxation year in which it first meets the definition. However, for an existing trust, the SIFT trust definition will not apply, and therefore the new rules will not apply until the earlier of the 2011 taxation year, and the taxation year in which the trust exceeds the normal growth guidelines issues by the Department of Finance on December 15, 2006, unless that excess arose as a result of a prescribed transaction. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, this is quite technical.

To achieve this, the provision in question contains an incorporation by reference of the normal growth guidelines issued by the Department of Finance, to which I just referred. Incorporation by reference is a proper and legal approach to enacting legislation. It is neither rare nor unusual in legislation. An examination of Canadian statutory law would reveal many instances where incorporation by reference has been used in just this fashion.

For example, sections 181.3 and 190.13 of the Income Tax Act refer to the use of risk-weighting guidelines issued by the Superintendent of Financial Institutions in order to determine the amount of capital of an authorized foreign bank. These guidelines are defined in section 248 of the Income Tax Act and are issued pursuant to section 600 of the Bank Act. I could go on with other examples, but I am sure the Speaker would find that a tad tedious.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for legislation to allow documents incorporated by reference in legislation to be changed from time to time. For example, section 11 of the Customs Tariff incorporate by reference the Compendium of Classification Opinions to the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System published by the Customs Co-Operation Council, as amended from time to time.

Therefore, it is not just in the Income Tax Act, but in other legislation as well that we see this same approach. As I said, we

could go on at length, but I shall save us and save the House that lengthy example. I think the Speaker has ample precedent there.

In terms of procedural arguments, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River essentially made three points. He has argued: first, that the provision is not in keeping with the practices and customs of this House; second, that the clause attempts to exempt itself from rules regarding parliamentary scrutiny of subordinate law; and third, that the clause does not comply with the government's own internal rules on legislative drafting.

Let me address each point in turn.

On the first point, the practices and customs of the House, the essence of the member's argument appears to be that the clause does not conform to the rules of the House. The government submits that Bill C-52 and all of its provisions are properly before the House. The provision in question was included in a detailed notice of ways and means motion tabled on March 27, which was adopted by the House on March 28.

The ways and means motion adopted by the House on March 28 included the identical provision that the member for Scarborough—Rouge River questioned. Therefore, the provision in question is consistent with the rules governing financial procedures.

I submit there are no procedural grounds for the clause to be ruled out of order. Rather, this is an issue that would be more appropriately considered by the Standing Committee on Finance in its review of the bill. Should the member wish to improve the text of the bill, he and his colleagues are free to propose amendments to the bill in committee.

Citation 322 of the sixth edition of Beauchesne's states that:

When a bill is under consideration, points of order should not be raised on matters which could be disposed of by moving amendments.

● (1510)

This clearly falls into that category.

With the exception of very limited circumstances, it is clear that only the House itself can decide to alter the content of bills

The 22nd edition of Erskine May states, at pages 544 and 545, the following:

Throughout all these stages and proceedings the bill itself continues in the custody of the Public Bill Office, and, with the exceptions mentioned below, no alteration whatever is permitted to be made in it, without the express authority of the House or a committee, in the form of an amendment regularly put from the Chair, and recorded by the Clerks at the Table or by the clerks from the Public Bill Office in standing committee.

As Marleau and Montpetit note, at page 620:

The Chair has clearly ruled in the past that when a bill is in possession of the House, it becomes its property, and cannot be materially altered, except by the House itself. Only “mere clerical alterations” are allowed. By issuing a corrigendum to the bill, the Speaker may correct any obvious printing or clerical error, at any stage of the bill. On the other hand, no substantive change may be made to the manner in which a bill was worded when it was introduced, or when a committee reported on it, otherwise than by an amendment passed by the House.

Points of Order

There would appear, Mr. Speaker, to be only two circumstances where the Speaker can make alterations to a bill: first, where the Chair has ruled that amendments adopted by a committee are beyond the scope of the bill, as you had recently ruled with respect to committee amendments to Bill C-257, the replacement workers bill; or second, when there is a clear printing error. As you noted in a ruling on February 23, 2004, this is only done in rare cases where there is a manifest error in the printing of the bill.

Apart from these limited instances, I submit that it is up to the House to decide whether or not to adopt a bill with or without amendment.

Even if you were, Mr. Speaker, to conclude that the provision of the bill as currently drafted is unacceptable, I would submit that the House and the committee should, first, have an opportunity to review the matter and consider possible amendments to improve the text of the bill.

In the event the provision in question remains in the bill at third reading, I submit that it is at that point when the Speaker should intervene on this matter in the unlikely case you think it is necessary.

It is analogous to the procedure that we use with private members' bills when we have those flaws. Committee exists and represents an opportunity for the flaws to be cured. If this is a flaw, indeed, that would be the place at which it could happen. The Speaker, if faced by a change that is unacceptable, does not need to put the question on that clause at third reading.

On the question of the review of statutory instruments, the hon. member has also suggested that the provision of the bill exempts itself from the rules of the House regarding parliamentary scrutiny of delegated legislation. It is not uncommon for bills to establish forms of delegated legislation that are not subject to the Statutory Instruments Act. It is perfectly within the prerogatives of the House to pass legislation to that effect. As I have indicated earlier, it is not the role of the Speaker to decide whether such legislation is appropriation.

The third point is the government guide for drafting.

The hon. member also suggested that the provision in question is not consistent with the government's "Guide to Making Federal Acts and Regulations".

The guide sets out principles for making legislation and regulations, as well as government processes for ensuring that statutory and legislative changes are made in an effective way.

Apart from the fact that this guide is by no means a procedural authority, I would also point out that the guide does not prevent the government from introducing legislation such as the provision in question, provided that the cabinet has authorized such legislation.

In conclusion, I would submit that clause 13(1) of Bill C-52 is properly before the House. This is a matter for debate. The issue is properly in the hands of the House and the finance committee will be better placed to examine whether this section of the bill is appropriate or whether it can be improved.

As always, I understand that the Minister of Finance is prepared to discuss this matter, and all matters related to the bill, further in

committee. Indeed, if there is any flaw, committee can certainly be curative in so doing.

● (1515)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. government House leader for his submissions on this important point. As he said, it was a tad technical, and I agree with him. However, I will review all these technical arguments and come back to the House with a ruling in due course on this matter.

Pursuant to section 28(9) of the Conflict of Interest Code, the hon. member for Calgary East, who is the subject of the report of the Ethics Commissioner previously tabled in the House, has the right to make a statement. The member shall not speak for more than 20 minutes and there will be no period of questions or comments.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Calgary East.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS COMMISSIONER

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to make a statement about the Ethics Commissioner's report tabled on March 30.

The Ethics Commissioner has concluded that I did not contravene the conflict of interest code for members of the House of Commons. I do not dispute this conclusion.

However, I do take issue with the inquiry process and the content of the report.

I urge hon. members of the House to not concur in the report. Instead, I would urge the House to refer the entire matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for a full and thorough investigation, with recommendations.

The inquiry process and the report violated the principles of procedural fairness.

The Ethics Commissioner did not inform me that an inquiry had been resumed. This deprived me of my right to make representations at all appropriate stages throughout the process. The code provides that procedural right. In fact, I only learned of the existence of the report one hour prior to it being tabled, but two months after the report says the inquiry had resumed.

The report includes many personal details about my extended family that the Ethics Commissioner learned during the investigation.

Personal information about the unhappy circumstances of my sister-in-law's marriage surely was not required to support the conclusions. Nor was there any need to write about stupid and unfounded allegations against my family that had nothing to do with this inquiry.

Surely the Ethics Commissioner is meant to exercise tact and discretion, like when he provides the report for public office holders. Surely he should limit his reports to such details as are necessary to support the conclusion, and no more. The code requires the Ethics Commissioner to conduct the inquiry in private and to provide relevant reasons for this conclusion. Why should all details from the private investigation be disclosed?

I will be asking the committee that personal details from the report that are not necessary to support the conclusion be removed from the report and from the Commissioner's website. The integrity of the code is at issue. All members of Parliament are at risk of such disclosures if the report stands as a precedent.

The procedure and House affairs committee will have to consider whether the way the Ethics Commissioner handled this report constitutes a further *prima facie* contempt of the House of Commons.

In October 2005, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs directed the Ethics Commissioner to suspend the inquiry. He did suspend it, but refused to do so because the committee asked him to. Instead, he suspended it because he had learned of an RCMP investigation into the matter, which went on to clear me of all allegations. In November 2005, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs found the Ethics Commissioner in contempt of the House of Commons since he did not comply with the provisions of the code.

The Ethics Commissioner had full knowledge of the direction of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to suspend the inquiry, although he refused to accept this direction at that time. The Ethics Commissioner resumed the inquiry but did not advise me. He did not advise the House of Commons. He did not seek guidance from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which had directed him to suspend the inquiry.

Now the report has been tabled without seeking the direction of the committee. The inquiry process and the report still suffer from the same kinds of problems that had concerned the committee when he was found in contempt. Once again, the Ethics Commissioner has shown no regard for procedural fairness and no regard for my family's privacy.

By resuming the inquiry without informing me and by tabling the report, the Ethics Commissioner has defied the will of the committee. Therefore, his conduct, in my opinion, constitutes a further contempt.

If the Ethics Commissioner has chosen to ignore what the members of the House have said about the subject matter of this inquiry, about the need to respect the personal privacy of my family, and the principles of procedural fairness, then how can we accept the report?

Let me quote what the committee said about its concerns: "The risks to Members, and the very integrity of the Code, demand nothing less".

•(1520)

Therefore, I will ask the House to refuse to concur in this report if a motion is brought before the House. I will take the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for a thorough

Business of Supply

investigation and a review of the provisions of the code to ensure its integrity. This will help ensure that in the future hon. members will have the benefit of procedural fairness from the conflict of interest inquiry process.

I have no objection if a new report is tabled after due regard to the concerns I have raised and the findings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in the 51st report, adopted on November 17 and tabled on November 18, 2005.

I want to say one more thing. Despite my repeated requests not to get involved in a family dispute, this request was ignored. A life was lost through suicide. The privacy of my sister-in-law and her two sons has been violated through no fault of their own. They have no recourse. When this was pointed out to the Ethics Commissioner by my sister-in-law during Mr. Shapiro's visit to Calgary, he chose to ignore it.

Because of this attitude, today the private details of my sister-in-law's life are published in the report tabled. Ethnic newspapers are now running articles on her life and the lives of her two sons. Is this fair? Also, I will ask women's rights groups this question: are they going to defend this woman's rights?

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1525)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and speak to this motion on military operations in Afghanistan, especially since a number of Canadian Forces personnel from 3 Wing Bagotville in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord are actively involved in the mission. I want to salute their courage and dedication.

Regardless of the disagreements that members of the House of Commons may have regarding the mission in Afghanistan, we all have full confidence in our men and women in the field. There is also no question of an early withdrawal of our troops before 2009. Canada has a duty to inform its allies before withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan because the 2009 deadline is rapidly approaching. That is basically what this motion proposes.

Even though we on this side of the House support the motion, we also propose a rebalancing of the operations in Afghanistan, particularly in regard to Canada's strategy for supporting peace in Afghanistan and the mandate and methods of the Canadian armed forces.

Business of Supply

The people of Canada and Quebec are divided on the issue of our military presence in Afghanistan. The Quebec nation has values and interests of its own, and whenever the Bloc Québécois takes a position on a motion or a bill, it must always ask itself whether this is in the interests of Quebec. Am I for this or against it? Each time we try to decide what the government of a sovereign Quebec would do. That is why today's debate is very important.

In light of what I have heard in the debates today, I believe that we need to rebalance the mission in Afghanistan. The basic objective of the international coalition and the NATO countries must be to rebuild the economy and democracy and make Afghanistan a viable country. To succeed in this, Canada must play a leadership role in delivering and distributing humanitarian aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It is important to state very clearly, not only for the members of the coalition and the NATO countries but also for the people of Quebec and Canada, that the Canadian army in Afghanistan is going to rebalance its efforts in the field.

The Bloc Québécois has always supported sending troops to Afghanistan as part of a NATO mission. The operation that Canada undertook was more or less a peace mission to stabilize the Kabul region and surrounding areas. Unfortunately, it has become a war operation.

Why are the people of Canada and Quebec still so divided when it comes to the presence of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan? The people have been told that the Taliban rebels have a fallback position in Pakistan and that they are getting stronger, not weaker. That is the situation. Moreover, according to NATO officials in charge of military deployment, there are not enough troops.

Quebeckers and Canadians must be given assurances that the government is capable of taking the Afghanistan situation to the next level after 2009. Right now, people think that the mission in Afghanistan is getting more and more dangerous.

The situation is getting a lot more dangerous, but there is still time to change the thrust of international intervention. Doing so is becoming more urgent. We will not win the support of the Afghan people by just fighting the Taliban with our weapons and chasing them around the mountains.

● (1530)

The Bloc Québécois is talking about bringing a new balance to the mission. If we continue doing what we are doing, more lives may be lost. Shifting the mission's focus in the following three areas is urgent.

First, we must increase reconstruction assistance and do a better job of coordinating it. From 2001 to 2006, Canada spent \$1.8 billion on military efforts and only \$300 million on reconstruction. This is extremely unbalanced. Put simply, this is a ratio of \$6 to \$1. For every \$6 spent on military activities and offensive action, \$1 was spent on reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

Second, the nature of our military activities must change. Everyone knows that we cannot provide assistance effectively without a minimum level of security. General Richards, the head of NATO forces there, is asking NATO countries for 2,500 more soldiers. Let me be clear: we will not succeed by repeatedly increasing the number of troops. We must remember that the priority

in Afghanistan must be speeding up development and reconstruction.

Third, we must drastically change how we look at the opium problem. Afghanistan is the source of 90% of the world's heroin supply. While maintaining our efforts against drug traffickers, we must propose an alternative to Afghan farmers by helping them establish programs for new crops, to grow something other than poppies, and we must help them build infrastructures such as roads, wells, public markets and hospitals.

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

The purpose of today's debate is to clarify the situation with respect to the coalition member countries and NATO member countries, as well as Canada's role after 2009. Like the people of Canada and Quebec, those countries have the right to know the issues and repercussions involved in the active participation of the armed forces and to demand that, as quickly as possible, Canadian operations focus more on humanitarian aid, social development and peacekeeping.

With respect to the mandates and methods used by the armed forces, our soldiers must not be like warriors or vigilantes. Rather, they should be considered more as agents of peace and reconstruction.

The most important thing is to redefine the mandate of our soldiers in Afghanistan. We must be able to measure the progress made. From that perspective, if we cannot quantify the progress, it becomes clear that public opinion will focus only on the loss of human life we are suffering.

Quebeckers and Canadians are willing to send troops to Afghanistan, but only if their safety can be ensured.

This is why the government must establish precise timeframes to rebalance the mission, and ensure that our soldiers have the resources they need to carry out reconstruction and security work in the field.

● (1535)

In closing, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to remind the House that, if the balance of this mission is not restored, we will no longer be able to support an operation that is doomed to failure.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. We know that there are problems in Afghanistan, problems with the Taliban, education, infrastructure and others. However, we know that withdrawing prematurely from Afghanistan would be detrimental to the Afghan government. It is very important that we support the Afghan government.

Business of Supply

[English]

Many of the arguments that have been made in the House in the debate on this motion have been to withdraw from the southern part of Afghanistan. However, there have not been convincing arguments to suggest how this move would enhance the stability of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and thereby contribute to the Karzai government's goals of establishing a civil society and a government that will be able to control all parts of the country, so that we do not have the return of an unstable regime that will foster radical groups that may come back to harm our interests here in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

We must win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. At present, poppy crops are their source of income. If we hound them or cut off their source of income by eliminating their crops, we will end up with Afghans who will go over to the Taliban. We must work on providing concrete solutions such as support for reconstruction and humanitarian assistance for Afghans.

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the great disappointments has been how the government has utterly mismanaged this entire mission at great personal expense to CF members and their families.

This mission has changed. As the hon. member from the government said, we are there to remove al-Qaeda. If we want to remove al-Qaeda, we should be dealing with Pakistan, the Horn of Africa and other areas.

I want to ask my hon. colleague this. Why does the government ignore the components of the mission that are necessary for the mission's success? Why does the government not call on President Bush and Prime Minister Blair to stop the eradication program for poppies? Why is it not calling Loya Jirga to bring forth the groups that are disaffected in Afghanistan and need to be included in the decision making process of the government? Why is it not investing in the Afghan national police, the judicial system, and a penal system to allow security to occur?

Unless we have an adequate, competent judicial system, then we are never going to have security. Why does the government not stop this ink blot strategy which is only putting our troops into a meat grinder that is going to cause them to lose their lives? Why do we not pull back to bases in southern Afghanistan, allow for the training of Afghan police and the army, and allow them to deal with Pashtun lands?

Finally, I want to ask the hon. member, does he not agree that we can never win this insurgency, that has its bases not within Afghanistan but in Pakistan, without dealing with the regional security component and calling for a regional working group that includes India, Iran, Pakistan and other interested groups because that is essential to the success of this mission?

● (1540)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I believe that we must recognize that the Prime Minister of the minority Conservative government is an acknowledged friend of the American president. In my opinion, the Prime Minister should take the lead and convince Mr. Bush to change this mission—a mission of war—and give it balance. As I mentioned earlier, there is a real disparity in spending: for every \$6 allocated to war, only \$1 goes to reconstruction.

The Prime Minister of the minority Conservative government has an important role to play and must demonstrate leadership in this matter. I also believe that it is the responsibility of the Prime Minister to notify NATO countries that, if things continue in this way, we will withdraw after February 2009.

If we truly wish to win this mission, if we want it to succeed, we must rebalance it and focus on reconstruction and on the social development of the Afghan people.

[English]

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say how pleased I am to have this opportunity to discuss this Liberal motion. It gives us an opportunity to talk about some concrete facts, not the way they have been distorted over the past several months or year and even today.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Sydney—Victoria.

Of the five points in the motion brought forward by the member for Bourassa, the defence critic, there are two points I will focus on. I wish to read them both, so that members and Canadians from coast to coast can appreciate what I am about to say. The first is:

(1) whereas all Members of this House, whatever their disagreements may be about the mission in Afghanistan, support the courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces;

The other is:

(3) whereas it is incumbent upon Canada to provide adequate notice to the other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of our intentions beyond that date;

On the first point, there is no question that each and every member in this honourable chamber and each and every Canadian support our military, not only our men and women who serve in missions abroad, for example in Afghanistan or other missions that they are engaged in today, but the men and women who do very important work here in Canada as well.

When a member from whichever party asks a question, whether it be in committee or in this honourable House or outside, that any member would have the audacity to take the position that the member asking the question does not support our military is shameful and uncalled for. I would go as far as to say it is unpatriotic. We are asking them to make sure that in whatever is being undertaken, whether it is procurement of equipment, whether it is upholding our three D policy of defence, development and diplomacy, we are indeed doing the right thing.

Business of Supply

I sit on the defence committee. The committee invites various representatives to brief us on an ongoing basis to keep us up to date on what is happening, to make sure that the policy the government has laid out is being carried out.

I would say to each and every member that even during question period when questions are asked, and I have heard it from my constituents and from Canadians in general, it is not wise to put up what have been described as Bush tactics. President Bush got away with it for six or seven years by using those tactics, but thank God the American people finally woke up and realized that that was not going to play out any more.

Nevertheless, on the second point in terms of our NATO commitment to Afghanistan, today the leader of the Liberal Party put it in perspective when he talked about clarity, and who better to talk about clarity than the person who brought clarity to this country and peace and harmony through his legislation. Today what he is asking and what I am asking and what I think the member for Bourassa is asking for is clarity.

It has been frustrating to ask questions over and over again of the new Conservative government, the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence. The rebuttals have been so ambiguous that we are being asked by our constituents to get a straight answer.

For example, recently the Minister of National Defence was on *Question Period* on television. When he was asked a question, he talked about 2010. The military experts who have come before our committee know better than we do, and they have said repeatedly that this is not a four, five, seven or 10 year mission. This mission is going to be anywhere between 20 years to 25 years. Nobody is questioning that.

• (1545)

Let me go back to May 2006. Today Canadians are asking what the compelling reason was to bring forward and debate for six hours a motion to extend the mission for an additional two years when the mission as we will recall had just commenced. We were two months into that mission. It is the same as someone who buys a car, drives it for a month, and before it is even broken in, says that he is going to trade it in because it is no good when he has not even put 500 kilometres on it yet.

The mission started. We had not even arrived there. We had not even set up yet and all of a sudden for no apparent reason, and we have not been told the reason to this very day, there was a proposal in the House to extend the mission for an additional two years. Fine, but I have a problem with that.

The minister and the committee went to Slovenia to the NATO meeting. The minister went there and literally begged the NATO partners and all the allies to lift the so-called caveats. This is what is most upsetting because we committed our men and women to an extension to 2009 without setting the terms of engagement before that commitment. It was a bad deal. Had we known then what the terms of engagement were, who knows, maybe we would have committed our men and women for the additional two years, but there were no terms.

After we made the commitment, all of a sudden we discovered there were these so-called caveats where other nations that are

involved cannot move their troops. They say that the Canadians can take care of the hot spots, no problem. When we ask them for support they say, "There are these caveats. We cannot really go down. We cannot really participate".

Earlier today the parliamentary secretary referred to conflicts in the past. The Conservative whip talked about the second world war and how we all engaged in the second world war. My father did as well. Many members' fathers and mothers participated in those major conflicts, but they engaged in those conflicts together. It was one collective effort. They did not stand up and say, "I am going to go fight over here", or "I am going to stay over there". That was not the strategy then. This is very upsetting to me.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister today in question period referred to it in answer to a question. He said that the people of Afghanistan want us to be there. Of course they want us to be there. In Cyprus they want us to be there. In Bosnia-Herzegovina they want us to be there. In Kosovo they want us to be there. In Darfur they want us to be there. They want Canadians to be in every trouble spot because we have an excellent reputation. But we cannot be everywhere. They also want the international community to do its fair share.

The Prime Minister said in answer to another question, "NATO is not asking us for a decision today". That is a very good answer. NATO did not ask for a decision in May 2006. The big question Canadians have is who put that initiative forward. We are ordering equipment today for our military, tanks and helicopters for example, that are not to be delivered until 2009-10. Canadians are asking for clarity.

On the development side people have come before our committee. Today people talked about young men and women going to school. When I hear that it pleases me very much. We also heard President Karzai in an interview with Peter Mansbridge on television during his visit say in his own words that this year 200,000 fewer students are attending school. That is not coming from any politician. That is coming right from President Karzai.

Development is not really where it should be. We must shut down that poppy growing area. We also found out in committee that President Karzai has apparently been negotiating with the Taliban. The Conservative Party says, "We are not going to deal with these terrorists. We are not going to deal with the Taliban". President Karzai is dealing with them at the cost of Canadian blood, and I do not accept that. We have to get that straight.

• (1550)

The Taliban has new equipment, ground to air missiles, we have been told in committee. Where is the Taliban finding the funds to buy this equipment? I believe that if we cut the head, the body will fall. We have to cut off the Taliban's ability to secure funds because it is through these funds that they are buying the equipment that is killing our men and women. We have to concentrate on that.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member asked for clarity. I agree that there is a great need for clarity in this debate. It is important for Canadians to understand that it is possible to support the troops profoundly but not support this futile failing mission. That point needs to be made from the start.

Business of Supply

I would appreciate it if the member could clarify the Liberal position. It seems to me that the Liberals want to attack the government over the mismanagement of the war, and I would have to agree that it is being mismanaged by continuing to put our young soldiers into harm's way in a futile failing mission. Yet the Liberals are saying it is okay to continue for another two years in this futile failing effort rather than use the experience, the resources and the knowledge that we have as peace negotiators to bring parties together, to bring neighbouring countries together to look at how peace can be achieved. Even Chris Alexander, Canada's former ambassador to Afghanistan and now the leading UN official in Afghanistan, says it is the absence of peace that is fuelling further conflict.

I wonder if the member could clarify the Liberal position in that regard.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, we are not attacking the government on mismanagement or anything. The government is giving ambiguous responses in terms of the commitment we made until 2009. Different signals are being sent to the country as a whole as to whether we are going to be there or not beyond 2009.

We simply want to know if the government is going to keep that commitment, or if it is going to extend it beyond 2009. We do not want the government to give us only another six hours of debate. We do not want the government to put us under the gun. We do not want the government portraying all parties, the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc, as being unpatriotic and supposedly not supporting our military just because we ask tough questions. That is really what we are asking.

The Liberal government of the day made a commitment because we are international participants in these initiatives, as we were in the former Yugoslavia conflict. We had an international obligation to participate. We made that commitment under the three D policy, defence, development and diplomacy, until 2007.

The then prime minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, made a commitment on television that after the Gomery report we would have an election within 30 days. The New Democratic Party chose to renege on it, overthrow the government, and thus gave the Conservative Party the opportunity to do what it wished, and it extended the mission.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is not clear is the position of the Liberals. The position on this side of the House is very clear: we support the mission. At this point it is premature and irresponsible to talk about the future of the mission beyond the date that has already been established. Sean Maloney, from the Military College, told us that an early withdrawal of the troops would give the Taliban a major psychological advantage.

I would like the member to tell us the advantages of an early withdrawal, given not only the considerable investments and sacrifices that have been made so far, but also the considerable progress achieved. Also, how can we support the reconstruction under way if we are not able to ensure security in Afghanistan?

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question.

Without repeating it, the motion very clearly specifies that we do support our troops. It is not a question of not supporting them. It is a question of clarity in terms of our disengagement from that mission, nothing more, nothing less. We support our military. We want to make sure our military has the right equipment. We are just asking for clarity in terms of exit time.

In terms of development, we all agree. It is not just Canada that is in Afghanistan. Before Canada went in to take its share of the burden, there were other players. Surely NATO does not work with overnight decisions. It knew after 2007 who was going in. There was a plan. We simply allowed it to extend that by extending our mission to 2009. If there is no planning right now as to what it is going to do post-2009, then NATO has a problem.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Afghanistan remains a cause of grave concern for members of the House and the Canadian people. The men and women of the Canadian Forces and our civilian personnel are continuing to earn our respect and pride. However, we are failing in our responsibilities to them. We do not constantly seek to evaluate the wider picture in terms of the current NATO policies and programs, as our parliamentary colleagues across the world are doing.

We know that NATO's objective of building conditions so the Afghan people can enjoy a representative government and self-sustaining peace and security is honourable but we cannot shy away from the realities of the daunting tasks faced by our troops and personnel in Afghanistan.

In 2001, Canada sought to utilize the 3D model in Afghanistan: defence, diplomacy and development. Being the critic for CIDA, today I want to speak to the latter, development, and voice my concerns in common with legislatures from other forces and other nations about where we are with development assistance in Afghanistan.

We know from committee testimony and from the antics in the House that the Conservative government is keen to distract attention and divert scrutiny when it comes to the Afghan mission. Members who dare to exhibit some concern, the Conservatives call them a Taliban lover.

We cannot deny that there has been some progress in Afghanistan. Some roads, hospitals and schools have been built and more women are going to school. Education in the political process is taking place and security sector reform has helped in the process of reconstituting the army and the police force. NATO's and Canada's approach to providing long term security and stability requires a comprehensive strategy that encompasses reconstruction and development, as well as military operations.

However, the coalition, Canada included, has taken on a mammoth task. We need to know that we have the equation correct in determining the proper mix between civilian and military activities. It is critical that we know that Canadian development aid is going to do the utmost before any possible pullout in 2009.

Business of Supply

Do we need to be doing more to extend our developmental footprint before 2009 rolls around? Should we not look, at the very least, to match our military expenditures in Afghanistan with development assistance dollars?

The former Afghan finance minister, now advisor to Karzai, has recently said that Afghanistan has reached a tipping point, warning that the population could turn against the international community if the economy and access to housing, employment and basic services are not improved. This sentiment has been echoed by Dr. Abdullah, a former Afghan foreign minister, saying that the Afghan people will not remain patient forever.

Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Five years after the international community came to Afghanistan, only 6% of Afghans have electricity. It has been estimated by the UN Refugee Agency that there are 130,000 internally displaced people, although that figure may be higher given the food and security problems in the south at present. We have not been able to address essential needs, including sustainable health clinics, sustainable provision of clean water and sanitation across the board.

Afghanistan is the largest recipient of Canadian development assistance at present, with nearly \$1 billion pledged up to 2011, but we need to do the job before 2009. The government, in playing with smoke and mirrors, recently announced \$200 million in reconstruction and development funds, which in reality were part of the existing pledge. However, the international community's spending per capita on development assistance is significantly lower than what was spent in Bosnia.

The Afghan government is limited in its capability to spend this assistance and, of the vast majority of aid set aside for Afghanistan, nearly 83% is spent by the international community on its projects.

• (1600)

A lot of donors chasing a variety of objectives, tying up aid and failing to coordinate, too often has a negative effect on a country's institutional capacity. It is even more negative when it is a fragile state like Afghanistan. Canada must pursue a strategy that is focused, with the real needs of the Afghan people in mind, and it must be coordinated.

I want to talk about the Kandahar province, which, in common with the other southern provinces, is teaching the international community that unless we can deliver services and provide protection to the civilian population, just the military operation alone will not suffice. It has also illustrated the major difficulty in the NATO mission tasking security cannot be achieved without development and yet development cannot be implemented without security. They go hand in hand.

Where NATO has not been able to extend effective governance away from the major urban centres, such as Kabul and Kandahar, the threat of renewed violence will always be there. Southern Afghanistan continues to be affected by extreme poverty and has recently suffered from drought. The system of food aid distribution has been erratic at best.

There is a real concern that the local disillusionment with ISAF troops may help to fuel a grassroots insurgency. Mr. Seth Jones with Rand corps, after two weeks in Kandahar, has claimed that while

Kandahar city and two other districts are seeing reconstruction, virtually nothing else is taking place in the rest of Kandahar province, mainly as a result of the security situation.

We need to ensure that our troops' safety is not jeopardized by a lack of impact of Canada's broader aid development policies that must address the real needs of the Afghan people, nor that a weakness in the reconstruction effort prevents the consolidation of tactical gains, as recently pointed out by Dr. Rubin in the journal of the council on foreign relations.

Sterling work has been done by our PRT in Kandahar province but let us not forget that PRTs are military organizations, not development organizations. They are designed to deliver quick impact projects, not to replace sustained long term development.

Qualifying efficiency in terms of the total amount of dollars spent and the number of projects completed has been problematic for some of the other PRT teams and we must be cautious not to fall into the same trap in deciding on the real impact of the work that we have already done.

Our developmental efforts in Afghanistan cannot be undertaken with just our own priorities and poll numbers in mind, as the government seems to believe. An effective developmental assistance program is about addressing Afghan's real needs, not what sells a story.

A lot of work still needs to be done in Afghanistan before 2009 and Canadian troops have already demonstrated a thousand times over their dedication, professionalism and cool-headedness under the most difficult situations. It is time the government really ramped up Canada's developmental assistance program and ensured that the Canadian mission is 100% successful.

• (1605)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour to be attending the Ontario Regiment when we had some returning veterans from the Afghan war. I asked them what we could do there. The member talks about guarantees in a war situation. They told me that there could not be any guarantees in war but that one of the things that could be guaranteed is that if we were to cut and run now, the country would go back to the dark ages within a week.

The Taliban is there and they want to return their regime to power. The Liberal Party and other parties are asking us to cut and run. I would like to quote Nigel Fisher, head of UNICEF Canada. He said that the discussion of exit strategy was misguided and unhelpful.

Does the member across realize the potential danger in which he is putting our soldiers? Does this not tell the Taliban that all they need to do is hold out and within a year and a half to two years they will be able to return, *carte blanche*, to do what they have been doing to the Afghani people? Does he really believe that the misguided position of the leader of the Liberal Party will do anything but return a tyrannical regime back to Afghanistan?

Business of Supply

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, a large contingency of the Cape Breton Highlanders are in Afghanistan right now and we are fully behind them. We fully supporting our troops. We are not cutting and running because we in the Liberal Party do not believe in doing that.

We believe we have a job to do over there. However, we believe we need a plan and a settled timeframe and that they must be in tandem. We also believe the military operation and the aid must go in tandem. If we want to support the troops, they need to see the aid coming in with them or very close behind them, otherwise, how do they get the Afghan people to believe that they are there for more than just to keep peace, that they are there to rebuild the country.

Canada and many countries learned this from the Marshall Plan after World War II. We learned that when we get stability, we need to go right back in with assistance and get the countries back on solid ground. That is what we are doing. We do not want to cut and run. We need a plan and we need both military and aid working in tandem so our troops are protected and they know the job is getting done.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been clear about the mission in Afghanistan. Our government has been very clear that we are committed to that mission to February 2009. The reason we are committed to that mission in southern Afghanistan is because it is important for the stability of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the government that President Karzai is heading. It is very important that we remain engaged in that theatre to ensure the stability of that government.

Beyond that date, our government has also indicated that we have taken no decisions. In the fullness of time, based on debates like this in the House and on other debates, the government will take a decision. In the fullness of time, we will have a debate on this in the House. However, to prematurely put a motion like this in front of the House is damaging.

The Liberals have not been clear on this. In November of last year, the leader of the official opposition stated that his view was that all troops should be pulled out of Afghanistan immediately. Today, mere months later, he is arguing that only troops should be withdrawn from southern Afghanistan.

Furthermore, to the point about this motion, members opposite have not made it clear how withdrawing troops from southern Afghanistan in February 2009 would enhance the stability of the Karzai government. Maybe the member for Sydney—Victoria could clarify how withdrawing troops from the southern part of the country would enhance stability.

• (1610)

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, we believe in this mission but we believe there needs to be a bit of a timeframe here for the sake of the troops, for the sake of supplies and for the sake of doing operations in other countries. We need to know, the troops need to know and the people in Afghanistan need to know that we are committed and that we are committed at least up to a certain timeframe. What the motion today is all about is clarity.

What we have seen in the House from the government is not clarity. We see this piecemeal approach from the other side,

especially on the development and the aid side. We do not see a plan to work in tandem with the aid and the military.

The government did not give us the opportunity the last time to properly debate the issues with Canadians and that is why this motion was put forward today.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton Centre.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express the gratitude of the constituents of Wetaskiwin to the brave men and women who serve our great nation as members of the Canadian armed forces and also to express our condolences to the families and friends of all of our brave soldiers who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I am proud to have the opportunity to discuss our mission in Afghanistan. This is a reckless motion from the official opposition that only encourages our enemies and could lead to more intensive action against our troops. But, instead, I would like to talk about why Canada made this commitment and what we are accomplishing.

Canada is fulfilling its duty as a member of the G-8, as a founding member of NATO and of the United Nations, to stand with the global community in the preservation and enforcement of peace and security.

Canada is in Afghanistan, together with more than three dozen other countries, as part of the UN-authorized international security assistance force. Our military is working alongside Canadian diplomats, the RCMP, municipal police officers, correctional services officers, and development workers in an integrated approach to help the Afghan people.

We are there working together with our Afghan partners, including the Afghan national army and the Afghan national police. We are helping the Afghan people carry out their plans for their country and we are helping them take real and positive steps toward achieving security within their country.

We are also securing the safety of Canadian citizens at home and abroad. After September 11, 2001, Canada acted in accordance with article 51 of the charter of the United Nations in the exercise of our individual and collective right of self-defence. The United Nations Security Council recognized this right in resolution 1368, passed on September 12, 2001. However, the Afghanistan mission is about much more than that.

Our Canadian forces are in Afghanistan at the request of the Afghan government. We have a moral duty to support them. Life for ordinary citizens in Afghanistan is very difficult. In the south, they face the worst kind of hardships and lack the most basic government services. Their communities lack proper education and health care, and public infrastructure is damaged or non-existent. Moreover, they live under threat from groups of violent extremists. Social and economic development for Afghan people cannot be achieved while these conditions remain.

Our troops, diplomats, police and development workers are working hard alongside our allies to help the Afghan people realize their hopes for a stable and secure future for themselves and for their families.

Business of Supply

The role of our Canadian Forces, an integrated and multi-dimensional approach, is something understood very well by our troops. As difficult as the job is, our men and women in uniform have met the people. They have seen the children. They know the country.

Beyond security operations, they know that our objectives of development and reconstruction are vital to success. Our men and women in uniform see great promise for the future of these people, especially the children. They believe, as all Canadians should, that supporting the democratically-elected government of Afghanistan is the best way to ensure that all Afghans can enjoy the basic rights and freedoms that we enjoy in Canada.

I want to pay tribute to the men and women of our Canadian Forces, especially those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country and our mission in Afghanistan. They come from places like Owen Sound, New Glasgow, Dalmeny, Comox and Montreal; places just down the road; places a few hours away; and places easily found on a map.

They were soldiers who believed in our mission, like all of the Canadian Forces members serving in Afghanistan. They made a difference in places like Panjwai, Daman, Spin Buldak, Ghorak, Khakrez and Kandahar City.

These soldiers helped in ensuring that Afghanistan never again slides into the clutches of the Taliban, or those like it.

These soldiers gave their lives to stabilize and rebuild a country that has known nothing but war for more than 20 years.

We must ensure that they did not die in vain.

They and their comrades in Kandahar today are leaving behind a proud legacy for the Afghan people: a legacy of hope and confidence in the future of Afghanistan.

Roads, schools, a reliable police force, a sanitary waste management system, clean water, toys for the children are just a few examples of the numerous and many projects these men and women have helped to accomplish; all huge gifts to the Afghan people; all things many of us take for granted in Canada.

Reconstruction and development in Afghanistan are Canada's fundamental goals and they remain a high priority for our government. Canadian troops are making it difficult for Taliban extremists to gain the upper hand. But all of this may be put at risk if Canada signals that it wants to withdraw from the military mission prematurely.

Our military is supporting Afghan objectives by building a safe and secure environment which is essential for long-lasting development. Thanks to our troops and other committed Canadians, we are making significant progress in Afghanistan, but we are not finished yet.

• (1615)

Our goals are simple. They have been outlined many times and they are consistent with the Afghanistan compact. When Afghanistan and its democratic government are stabilized and able to independently handle domestic security concerns, and when the terrorists and their local support networks are no longer a

destabilizing threat to Afghanistan, we will know that we have succeeded.

We are moving toward these goals. Canada has contributed greatly to Afghan progress so far and Canadians should be proud of our reconstruction efforts. We have truly broken new ground in our approach to development. Our provincial reconstruction team is helping to reinforce the authority of the Afghan government in Kandahar province. It is assisting in the stabilization and development of the region and it is monitoring security, promoting Afghan government policies and priorities with local authorities, and facilitating security sector reforms.

However, the PRT cannot do its work without the security operations that are still being carried out to help stabilize the Kandahar region. Addressing the root conditions of instability is our focus. Our goal is to help the Afghan people rebuild their country so that they can govern and protect themselves.

Our progress in the Kandahar region over the last year has laid the groundwork for continued improvement. Our forces and their Afghan partners are now patrolling in areas previously considered Taliban sanctuaries, confronting the Taliban where it has not previously been challenged. Our operations in the Pashmull and Panjwai areas have also planted vital seeds of development.

We are building Afghanistan development zones in strategic areas, pockets of development from which future renewal can spread. We are helping to build up the Afghan national security forces through our work at the national training centre, through combined operations with the Afghan authorities, and through initiatives such as our operational mentoring and liaison teams.

Daily, Canadian men and women are meeting ordinary, hard-working and peace-loving Afghans. They are conducting meetings with elders, delivering development aid and making a difference in the everyday lives of Afghans. Importantly, they are building Afghan domestic capacity and helping us move closer to our ultimate objective of a fully independent and stable Afghanistan.

Furthermore, Foreign Affairs Canada is making a profound contribution in promoting Afghan governance. Our diplomats are providing Afghan officials with advice on a range of key issues such as promoting and protecting human rights, security sector reform, and building sound international institutions.

CIDA is also working hard to assist the government of Afghanistan. It is continuing to deliver on Canada's aid commitments in Kandahar and across the country. Canadian police officers are building the capacity of their Afghan counterparts. They are monitoring, advising, mentoring and providing much needed training.

As a Canadian, I am very proud of all of our country's efforts.

I want to conclude by reminding this House how, once again, our Canadian Forces have stepped to the forefront to protect Canadian interests, to promote our values and to help Afghanistan. Our soldiers are among the best in the world and they are making progress in one of the most volatile regions of Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

Are the Canadian Forces finished with the job we have asked them to do in Afghanistan? The answer is: not yet. Will they be finished on February 28, 2009? It is too early to tell.

We brought forward a motion to the House of Commons to extend the current Afghan mission to February 2009. The government has been clear that, if it were to seek further extension, it would come to Parliament to do that, and that remains our position.

Canada has invested much in this mission. We have another two years remaining in our commitment, two years of challenges, two years to make more progress, and two years of lighting beacons of renewal in the harsh landscape of a war-torn country.

Now is not the time to turn tail and run. Now is the time to remember Canada's commitment and the reasons behind it.

• (1620)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the hon. member's comments. They certainly reflect the kind of dialogue that is coming out of the government.

I want to go back a little bit to after 9/11 when we originally went to Afghanistan. We went there to remove al-Qaeda. We went there to remove in part the Taliban. We were successful to a degree certainly in removing al-Qaeda.

The problem is that in the south where our troops are right now, in the area of Pashtun tribal lands, is an area that has never been able to be tamed by western forces. That is the concern that I have.

I have a military base in my riding and our hearts go out to the families as well as our deep appreciation to the Canadian Forces members who are doing an extraordinary job there and to the families who support them. They have our undying love, appreciation and gratitude for their courageous work.

However, my fear is that what we have done is we have put our troops in an area that is very different from Kabul in the north. The Pashtun tribal lands that go into Pakistan, where in fact the Taliban's bases are, is a situation that we cannot win. We are fighting an insurgency that has its bases outside the country with which we are dealing.

What the insurgents are going to use and have been using to kill our troops are the IEDs, the suicide bombers and the snipers. We are fighting an unconventional war with conventional means. We will lose. We are putting our troops into a meat grinder without giving them the political component parts that are necessary for their success.

I want to ask the member this. Would a better solution not be to take our troops back, stop the ink blot strategy, put our troops in and just use them to remove Taliban forces if they are coming in en masse, while enabling an increased ability—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member had two minutes to ask a question. He did not get there. The hon. member for Wetaskiwin.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I am pretty sure there was an attempt at a question there.

The member, of course, is clearly coming from the Liberal perspective. To point it out and be clear, the Liberal perspective was

to commit our troops to Afghanistan back in 2001 or 2002 and there have been several extensions from Liberal governments.

Many constituents came to me during the last election campaign and said it is unfortunate that our Canadian troops are in the southern part of Afghanistan. They said the reason they were in the southern part of Afghanistan is because when we had to go to renew, their suspicion was that the previous Prime Minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard at the time, dithered, dodged and delayed. When it came time for the government to actually make a decision, it was not discussed in the House but just made. There was no vote, no debate on that particular issue. When that decision was made, all that was left was Kandahar. That is what my constituents are telling me.

What they are also telling me is that it is not time to turn tail and run. The Liberals seem to think that falling back, along with all the other nations that are not willing to send their troops in and that have caveats on their troops, is the way to lead the way to a brighter future for the people of Afghanistan.

So, we would be fall back, retreat and lead from the sidelines and tell the others to go and we will stand back. We will not do anything. We will not take the lead on this. This is not the heritage—

The Deputy Speaker: There is time for one more question.

The hon. member for Halifax.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks I am sure all members will be aware that the United Nations Secretary General reported to the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan. He reported that the insurgency continued to pose a significant challenge to the authority of the government and presented a danger to civilians and assistance providers alike. He went on to talk about what a very worrisome situation this deteriorating situation was. It simply flies in the face of all the claims about how conditions have improved significantly.

I have a very hard time understanding how Conservatives and Liberals alike, and even some members of the Bloc, can say that it is absolutely clear that what we are doing is not working, that insecurity is growing, and yet what we should do is go on doing more of the same.

I want to ask the member—

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please, but if the hon. member is going to have a chance to respond he has got to do it now.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that I am completely confused by the position of the members of the NDP. The NDP is the party of protest. It is going to go out and put a bunch of bumper stickers on the backs of cars that say "pull our troops out of Afghanistan".

As soon as we pull our troops out of Afghanistan, the Taliban is going to come in and wreak havoc. Then the NDP members are going to put bumper stickers on their cars saying "we protest the Taliban". Then the NDP will tell the government that Canada should go in and do something about it.

Business of Supply

We are doing something about it right now. We are there. We should get the job done and give the troops the support of a unified Parliament here in Canada, and show our enemies that we are not going to back down.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be able to participate in this debate on our mission in Afghanistan, and to speak about the men, women and families of the Canadian Forces that I am so proud of.

I would like to start by reminding everyone that this government committed to remaining in Afghanistan until February 2009. We have not made any commitments beyond that. However, announcing a definite withdrawal date for our troops today would hurt the mission and the work we are doing to rebuild the country.

[*English*]

We brought a motion forward to the House of Commons to extend the current Afghan mission to February 2009. The government has been clear that if it were to seek a further extension it would come to Parliament to do that, and that remains our position.

When the time comes to make a decision, the government will consider many factors. We will do just that, but this motion today from the opposition is in fact a reckless motion that encourages our foes and could lead to more intensive action against our troops.

I would like to pick up on a few of the things that I have heard today. The leader of the official opposition said that this motion is about the good of Afghanistan and the good of Canada's troops. In fact, this motion puts exactly that good in jeopardy.

What this motion in fact would do is empower the Taliban and tell the people of Afghanistan that we will not be there for them in their most basic need: physical security.

We heard a member of the NDP quote Winston Churchill saying that it is better to jaw-jaw than to war-war, and I do not disagree. Churchill said many other insightful things. He also said that an appeaser is one who feeds an alligator hoping that it will eat him last. The Taliban is an alligator.

Winston Churchill was also the leader who had the courage and determination to take on the alligator of Naziism, without time limit, until the mission was accomplished. What he certainly did not do was invite the enemy into the cabinet war rooms or telegraph allied strategy and timelines.

My colleague, the Chief Government Whip, was criticized for reminding the House about some of that history. The Liberals countered with talk about caveats. There are no caveats to evil. There is simply evil.

There is only one way to deal with evil. That way is not the Pollyannaish approach to foreign policy and defence espoused by the NDP, which suggests that the Taliban may not really be evil at heart and we just do not understand them. That is right up there with the utterly idiotic soft power approach to foreign policy engaged in by former Liberal minister of foreign affairs Lloyd Axworthy.

It was that misguided ideology of soft power that resulted in the decade of darkness and decimation that the Canadian Forces

underwent at the hands of the party opposite. This government is turning that situation around for the benefit of the people of Canada, the people of Afghanistan, our allies, and the brave men and women of the Canadian Forces.

I do not doubt the sincerity of all members of the House. What I do question is their grasp of some of the realities of military and foreign affairs.

We have talked about many things today that are indeed important, such as reconstruction, development and so on. However, the essence of this motion is about the defence portion of this mission.

I know there are members of the House who are well read on the subject of warfare through authors such as Sun Tzu and von Clausewitz. I am pretty sure the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore is one of them. There are many quotes by the member that show he is well read in that area and that he cannot possibly support this motion in his heart.

One of the things that we do not do in warfare is telegraph our intentions to the enemy. No matter what the opposition wants to believe, that does empower the enemy and it does put our men and women at greater risk.

Clearly, there is planning happening. We have heard various dates tossed around. Planning is a constant in any military organization. In any government organization, planning is a constant. Any organization that fails to plan is in fact planning to fail.

The NDP also talked about meaningful peace building, reconstruction and development and suggested that somehow this is not what is happening. That is what is happening.

It is slower than we would like and it is painful, but it is happening, bearing in mind that we are in one of the toughest areas in the entire country, which has 34 provinces, in 28 of which, relatively speaking, we have peace, security, development and so on.

Canada has drawn the tough job of doing that in Kandahar. We do that job because, frankly, our people are the best and our equipment is the best. Development is happening and it is happening only because of the defence component of the mission that Canada is contributing to so strongly.

Let me remind hon. members that everything that every member of the Canadian Forces does every single day is about peace. Members can call it what they want, but the ultimate aim of everything they do is peace.

Like the Chief Government Whip, I was also privileged to spend Christmas outside the wire in the Panjwai district of Afghanistan. One of the most meaningful experiences of my life was sitting up on Christmas Eve with Chief of the Defence Staff General Rick Hillier at a place called Ma'sum Ghar, out where the Taliban roam, smoking a cigar and talking about war and peace and people in politics.

● (1630)

There is no question that General Hillier and everybody there would rather have been at home with their families at Christmas. There is no question that everybody knew why they were there. They knew it was important and they were getting on with the job.

Business of Supply

We spent about 30 hours outside the wire, travelling the roads in convoy in LAV IIIs and Nyalas. We saw markets open. We saw children playing. We saw women going about their business. Markets are not like the Byward Market here, but for those Afghans, that was a sense of normalcy. It was a bit of real life. It was only happening because our people were there.

I spent a lot of time at the garrison in Edmonton. I spent a lot of time meeting flights coming back with wounded or just with people rotating back from the mission in Afghanistan. I have talked to families. I have talked to families who have lost people over there. They get it. They understand why the military part of the mission is so essential.

People talk about the emphasis on military versus reconstruction and so on, and they use simplistic numbers, saying there are 1,200 members of the battle group and only 350 members or whatever in the PRT. It is not as simple as a one for one for one split. There are jobs to be done and the jobs are getting done, but none of those jobs will get done without the basic defence and basic security part of the mission. We are making progress.

Canada also has a responsibility. At the United Nations, the former Liberal prime minister talked about the responsibility to protect and we agree with that. Countries like Canada do have a responsibility to protect other nations and other peoples that cannot protect themselves. They have a responsibility to join with other nations, as we have done in the 37 nation alliance that is in Afghanistan right now.

I will just point out to members that one of those 37 nations is in fact Croatia. It was not that long ago that we were helping Croatia out of a difficult situation. Maybe if we get this right, along with our allies, just maybe in five years or 10 years Afghanistan will be a member of an alliance that is helping another country to keep from becoming a failed state.

No one can guarantee success in any mission. No one can guarantee that any mission is going to be done by any date. We did not do that in 1914 or 1939 or in 1950 in Korea. We joined together with other peace-loving countries, other western liberal democracies, to get a job done for the benefit of people in another country who could not get the job done for themselves.

Canada has always taken on these responsibilities and I am proud of that as a Canadian. That does not mean it is easy. Doing the right thing is never easy, but it is still the right thing to do.

Our personnel are playing an important role in Afghanistan. They are helping to ensure that the country becomes secure so that reconstruction and economic development can take place. The government is committed to remaining in southern Afghanistan until February 2009. We have not made any commitments beyond that date and it is premature to do so.

As I have said, there are any number of plans out there on any number of shelves. It does not mean that the plans are going to be carried out, but we do have to plan.

I believe that to announce a departure date for our troops today would be detrimental to the mission. It would be detrimental to the welfare of our Canadian Forces men and women. It would certainly

be detrimental to the benefit of the Afghan people we are trying to help.

Alex Morrison, president of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, put it strongly when he said that "placing a definite withdrawal date would place the lives of our soldiers in danger". At the appropriate time the government will decide whether to renew our military contribution to the multinational mission, whether to change it or whether to withdraw altogether, but it will come back to the House.

That is the essence of the motion: we cannot empower the enemy by saying that as of this date we are just going to close up shop from a very difficult mission and turn it over.

We are not going to do that. Canada will not abandon its responsibilities to Canadians and to people in countries around the world who are counting on us to live up to our responsibility to protect.

This motion puts Canadians and Afghans at risk and should be defeated.

• (1635)

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all of us who are old enough to remember the Vietnam war should be intent on ensuring that when our Canadian troops are deployed the mission is clear, the plan for success is precise, and the timeline is definite. We owe our troops that much.

The hon. member talks about the necessity of planning. I would ask the hon. member if he believes that the current Afghanistan mission is one where the mission is clear, the plan for success is precise, and the timeline and exit strategy are well defined. Does the hon. member believe that this mission has these attributes?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, while I thank my hon. colleague for the question, I am afraid it does expose a bit of naiveté. I wish that conflict were precise, clear and definite. I wish that war were precise, clear and definite.

If everything was that definite, we probably would not get there in the first place, but we get there because of people like the Taliban and other terrorist organizations or national organizations around the world that prey on their own people. There is nothing clear, precise and definite about it, but the mission is clear.

We are there to get the Afghan national army, the Afghan national police, the government of Afghanistan and the economy of Afghanistan strong enough so that on their own they can carry on, because the Taliban is not going to disappear.

One of the people we met in Afghanistan was Abdul Rahim Wardak, former chief of defence staff and now minister of national defence of Afghanistan. He grew up with Osama Bin Laden. He grew up with the Taliban. He knows how evil they are. He knows that we cannot put a tick on a calendar and say, "That's it. When we're there, we're done".

We cannot do that. We must have an objective in mind, which is the ability of Afghanistan to stand on its own and to look after itself. When that happens, the job will be done.

Business of Supply

Will we still be there when that happens? I do not know, because none of this is precise. I wish it were.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member's comments, if we get it right, do not inspire much confidence. I believe that we had better get it right if we are putting our young Canadians in harm's way.

It seems quite clear that here we are talking about a war against an idea, a war of ideas, and the seek and kill counter-insurgency mission seems very unlikely to win the hearts and minds of those whose minds we are trying to change and whose hearts we are trying to win.

I am wondering how the member thinks we can crash down some doors, bomb villages, and build and undertake a very serious effort at inclusive and comprehensive peace negotiations.

• (1640)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, once again I am afraid my hon. friend reveals her naiveté. On August 19, 1942 at Dieppe we were probably pretty sure we did not have it right, but we sure did not quit.

She talks about the conflict in this war being a conflict against an idea, or an ideal, or an ideology. If evil is an idea or ideology, then she can bet that is what this is.

This is a war against evil, pure and simple. It is a war against an outfit called the Taliban, which is associated with an outfit called al-Qaeda, which is associated directly or indirectly with a whole bunch of other outfits around the world. They are, pure and simple, in four letters, evil. It is a four letter word.

Canada will always defend others against evil, whether it is Canadians, whether it is Afghans and whether it is people in World War II or any other place. Canada will always defend people against that four letter word, evil, and we will not tolerate anything else.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Labrador.

First of all, like all my colleagues on both sides of the House today, I want to pay tribute to the men and women in the Canadian Forces for serving their country and their government in such an exemplary manner.

I will draw primarily on the first half of the speech that the Leader of the Opposition gave in February, in order to give some background and explain how we have reached the point we are at today.

[*English*]

First came Operation APOLLO. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, of which Canada is a founding member, invoked article 5 of its charter, which declares that an attack on one member of the alliance is an attack on all. This marked the first time in the history of NATO article 5 had been invoked. The principle underlying article 5, collective security, is one for which Canada will always stand.

In 2002, therefore, Canada went to Afghanistan under a UN mandate with 31 of our allies. For six months, roughly 800 Canadian

soldiers joined the international coalition in Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban. This mission had a clearly defined purpose and a clear exit strategy.

After the Taliban was overthrown, the international community had an obligation to remain in Afghanistan to help stabilize and rebuild the country, one of the poorest countries in the world devastated by 30 years of foreign invasions and civil wars, and thus came Operation ATHENA.

In February 2003 Prime Minister Chrétien decided that Canada would lead the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, in Kabul for one year. This was a multinational force, involving many countries, whose mission was to provide security in the capital to assist the newly created Afghan transitional authority and to help set the appropriate conditions for presidential and parliamentary elections. The Afghan elections took place successfully and peacefully, thanks in part to the assistance provided by Canada, and resulted in the election of President Hamid Karzai.

With 2,000 Canadian troops on the ground and General Hillier commanding the 6,000 strong ISAF force, Canada's effort was at the time our most significant mission in decades. Our soldiers did an outstanding job earning the praise and respect of our allies and of all Canadians.

From the outset, the Chrétien government worked hard to secure a replacement nation for Canada once the one year ISAF mission ended. Consequently, in 2004 Turkey replaced Canada as the lead nation in ISAF. We were able to reduce our presence on the ground, remaining engaged with about 750 troops as well as a major development assistance contribution. At this time, Canada's commitment to Afghanistan became our largest bilateral development program in our history.

Also in 2003, with the support of the Afghan government, UN-NATO assumed responsibility for the ISAF mission. Shortly thereafter, NATO again, with the full support of the Afghan government, decided to expand its presence outside of Kabul and gradually expanded its involvement for reconstruction and security throughout all Afghanistan. Thus were born the provincial reconstruction teams, or PRTs.

As part of the NATO expansion, the previous government, led by the member for LaSalle—Émard, decided to establish a provincial reconstruction team of roughly 250 personnel in Kandahar province. Many countries have PRTs throughout Afghanistan. Their mandate is to establish the authority of the Afghan government throughout the country and to assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

In addition to the PRT, the previous government committed a task force of about 1,000 troops to Kandahar for one year, from February 2006 to February 2007, to work with our allies to provide security in this dangerous region and to facilitate the transition from a U.S.-led mission to a NATO-led one.

Business of Supply

The key objective of this mission was first and foremost reconstruction and establishing security, recognizing that we would be undertaking this crucial work in a dangerous region. The government was under no illusion this mission would be more dangerous than our previous engagements in Afghanistan, as was said repeatedly by the then ministers of defence and foreign affairs.

However, Canada, NATO and the Americans had not anticipated how violent and dangerous Kandahar would become in 2006. Between January and May 2006, eight soldiers and one diplomat were killed. That contrasted sharply with the seven fatalities the Canadian Forces sustained in Afghanistan over the previous four years.

By May, a mere three months after Canada's combat force went into Kandahar, the current government knew that we were facing a significant and violent insurgency, well beyond anything NATO had experienced in the past or for which it had planned. Before too long we saw that the Canadian effort in Kandahar had shifted from the original overriding objective of reconstruction to fighting a violent insurgency.

• (1645)

Faced with a rapidly deteriorating security environment, the Conservative government did not take the time to determine whether and how our mission could still achieve the goals we had set up. Instead, the Prime Minister extended the mission by two years without having obtained commitments from our allies to help us cope with the changed situation.

The Conservative government made no prior effort to obtain assurances from the government of Pakistan, for instance, to secure its border with Afghanistan, across which the insurgents move with impunity. It received no assurances from our NATO allies to replace Canada at the end of our mission.

In addition, the Prime Minister said that this mission would not hinder Canada's ability to undertake peace support missions elsewhere, such as in Darfur or Haiti. However, within a few weeks of the vote in Parliament in May last year, the defence minister made it clear that Canada no longer had any such troop capacity. General Hillier, the Chief of Defence Staff, has more recently confirmed this.

Let me quote the Prime Minister during that May 17, 2006, debate before the vote later that evening as to why, perhaps, we are doing what we are doing today. I am quoting from *Hansard*. He said:

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

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.

I put it to the House that the mindset of the Prime Minister, and it has been demonstrated by the responses and comments from the

Minister of Defence, may very well be of the government pursuing this beyond February 2009. The Prime Minister said that in his speech in the House in May of last year. It is therefore important that we make this quite clear. The will of Parliament, and we will determine that with a vote on this, is that after February 2009 another member of NATO will do what Canada has done since last year in Kandahar.

It is not walking away, cutting and running. It is ensuring that NATO, which is the lead agency in this endeavour, ensures that the load is shared by its members and not carried punitively by one member of NATO. That is the intent of the clarity of this motion. I sure hope my colleagues understand this is the extent, nothing else, and none of the imaginings we have heard today.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

In closing—and I do not necessarily blame the government for this—the main objective of our mission in Afghanistan, which is the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan, is being neglected and is not being met.

When we as the government make decisions on behalf of Canadians, we have to consider what Canadians want. Canadians do not want to be in Afghanistan indefinitely, and they certainly do not want to be there for military reasons alone. Defence must be balanced by development and diplomacy, and this government does not seem to want to respect that balance.

With the adoption of a motion such as the one before us today, we hope that the government can refocus Canada's mission in Afghanistan, at least until February 2009.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have difficulty understanding today's Liberal motion, which seems to me to be premature and irresponsible. I would like the member for Ottawa—Vanier to tell me what he thinks about a statement by the special assistant to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who said that if United Nations troops left Afghanistan, the country would plunge into civil war again. If the coalition forces were to withdraw now, all the investments, sacrifices and achievements of the past five years would go up in smoke. More importantly—and this is what I would like the hon. member to comment on—he adds that Afghanistan was the hub of international terrorism and could well be again.

Our job as parliamentarians is to ensure the security of Canadians. The link between the mission in Afghanistan and the security of Canadians is clear. How can the member for Ottawa—Vanier support a motion that threatens the security of Canadians here in Canada?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is incorrect: he forgets that our presence in Afghanistan is an intrinsic part of a broader mission that relies on more than the participation of our country alone. We are there because the United Nations and NATO are there.

Business of Supply

As far as the multilateral forces are concerned, the will of the previous government, just like—I hope—that of the current government, was to participate in multilateral missions. The responsibilities are shared by a number of countries. After seven years, including three in Kandahar, Canada will have done its share, in our opinion. It will therefore be time for another member of the NATO sponsored multilateral mission or of the UN to replace Canada in Kandahar, if the presence of a force is still necessary.

No one on our side is talking about leaving Afghanistan. However, being the only ones in charge in Kandahar for an undetermined number of years, we believe the duration of the mission should be limited to February 2009.

[English]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the Liberal member's comments, particularly in view of his response to the question raised with him, will leave Canadians more confused than ever on the position of the Liberal Party as represented by MPs in the House. We have heard a number of members of the Liberal caucus acknowledging that there are deep flaws in the current strategy. They have acknowledged that conditions are deteriorating, that insecurity is greater than ever, that there are increased numbers of civilian casualties and on and on.

Then I just heard the Liberal member say that when we do pull out, when we finish continuing with the same failing strategy for two more years, that someone else should come along and continue with the same failed strategy. The Liberals are not advocating for this strategy to be abandoned, or rethought or reoriented.

Could the member please clarify the comments he has just made to that effect?

• (1655)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, we will not know the situation in Kandahar in 2009. I cannot speak for the NATO leadership or what actions will be agreed upon in two years' time.

We are saying our country, through the current government, gave a commitment to be there, and we believe that commitment has to be respected. Once that commitment is over, we believe it should be ended. Canada will have done its part in assuming the current leadership in Kandahar. That should be shared with other members of NATO.

When we took over the leadership role in Kabul for a year, one thing we did was ensure that there would be another NATO nation member assuming that leadership after us. The current government does not seem to want to have any discussions as to who would replace Canada in Kandahar, if that is still necessary, in February 2009.

We believe the will of the House should insist that the government signify to NATO that we want our role there to be taken over by someone else, if it is still required at that time, which NATO will determine, but the government is refusing. I quoted the Prime Minister. He is looking to February 2009 “and beyond”, and we are not prepared to give that commitment.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Before resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as

follows: the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Afghanistan; the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to the motion put forward by my colleague from Bourassa.

Members on this side of the House are calling on the government to offer clarity and certainty to the Canadian people when it comes to our military mission in Afghanistan. There are Conservatives on that side of the House who will argue that to even raise this debate, to even ask these types of questions, is not to support the troops. Nothing could be further from the truth.

My riding of Labrador is a military riding in two senses. We have a major defence installation, 5 Wing Goose Bay, which has served the needs of Canada and our allies on both sides of the Atlantic since 1941. We also have numerous men and women in uniform in all three branches of the Canadian armed forces and many who have served overseas in Afghanistan, the Balkans and other international deployments over the years. Our broader community has been directly affected by our commitment as Canadians to serving in military missions overseas.

The past two weeks, as we all know, have been difficult for all of us, with nine Canadian servicemen losing their lives in the line of duty in Afghanistan. One of those was Private Kevin Kennedy, whose mother is from Wabush, Labrador. He is one of five soldiers from our province who has paid the ultimate price in service for the defence of Canada during the Afghanistan mission. On behalf of all Labrador constituents, I would like to extend my deepest condolences to the Kennedy family and to all those whom Private Kevin Kennedy touched in his life.

I can say with full confidence that the people of Labrador, who I represent, support our troops and hold our Canadian armed forces in the highest regard. At the same time, Labradorians and indeed all Canadians demand and deserve an open and respectful debate on Afghanistan and our future role in that country.

It is an important principle of military policy in Canada and in all democratic nations that our armed forces are under civilian political responsibility. This means that the policy questions of what we expect our armed forces to do and how we expect them to carry out the tasks that Canadians require them to do are separate from day to day military operations. We can and should discuss policy without any fear of being smeared as not supporting our troops.

Wherever we send our Canadian armed forces in the world, whether to Afghanistan or the Balkans in the 1990s, or on humanitarian missions such as the relief operations in the wake of the Asian tsunami or hurricane Katrina, Canadians are proud of our men and women in uniform and support them fully. However, that is and must be separate from the policy questions of what we as a country and as a society want our armed forces to do on our behalf.

Business of Supply

There are also some who will falsely allege that by raising these questions is to be soft on terrorism. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. I remember very well the morning of September 11, 2001. We all remember the horror of what became the worst single terrorist plot in human history, with nearly 3,000 dead, 9,000 injured and countless lives changed forever. We also remember that this plot was carried out by al-Qaeda, which at the time enjoyed the support and safe haven offered to it by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

That is why Canada, under the leadership of our former prime minister, Jean Chrétien, joined with the United States and our allies in a multinational effort to dismantle the Taliban regime, bring order to Afghanistan and to ensure that the country would no longer be a haven for international terrorism. That was a decision of a Liberal government and it was the right decision.

We will never let it be said that we are soft on terrorism. When the world needed us, we were there and our record will stand the test of history.

All that being said, there is no reason why we should not now, six years later, engage in a respectful and intelligent debate on what our role in Afghanistan should be in the future.

Canada has committed to remaining in Afghanistan until February 2009 and we support that, but we also take the position that Canada needs to set out a firm date for our rotation out of Afghanistan, with our place, after nearly a decade, to be taken up by one of our NATO partners.

It is not a question of abandoning Afghanistan. We are committed to a multi-pronged approach to achieving progress for the people of Afghanistan. That includes military operations for the duration of our involvement in the Afghanistan mission. It also includes diplomacy, development assistance and support for Canadian NGOs who are at work in the country, and by every means at our disposal to build a civil society.

• (1700)

However, we must not let the remnants of the Taliban dictate our policy or, even as the governing Conservatives suggest, dictate the terms of our political debate.

Our long-standing parliamentary tradition, our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our human rights laws demand respect for free speech and respectful debate. This is fundamental to our democratic society. It is not a sign of weakness that we can have this debate. It is a sign of strength. It is everything that the Taliban has fought against.

To avoid this discussion, to avoid this conversation because of what the Taliban might read into it, because of whatever false hope they might derive from it, is to let ourselves become their puppets. It cannot happen and it will not happen.

These open debates make our democratic institutions such powerful examples for the world and for our friends in the fledgling Afghan democracy.

Afghanistan, with international support, including that of the Government of Canada and with the Canadian armed forces, have made progress since the fall of 2001 and the fall of the Taliban regime. We are proud of our achievements and we stand in full

support of what our Canadian armed forces have achieved on the ground in Afghanistan. We support them.

We continue to support them even as we begin the rational and constructive process of discussing how Canada will disengage, just as we have done so in our other overseas deployments since the second world war.

It is not weakness to begin this policy discussion. It is not softness. It is strength. It is the strength of our democracy and the image of Canada we seek to project around the world.

We are proud of our record in Afghanistan and will remain proud, even as we work to transition our military responsibilities, and as we seek to ensure a robust continued Canadian involvement in Afghanistan through our other branches of the Canadian government and other instruments of foreign policy.

The Conservatives will try to score crass political points with this matter but they will fail, just as they have failed in their other shameful attempts to politicize our Canadian armed forces.

During the last election campaign, for example, they made an astounding variety of political promises to Goose Bay in my riding, promises they are unable to provide and increasingly unwilling to keep.

It was not just Goose Bay. They made similar promises on the backs of the Canadian armed forces and the Department of National Defence in St. John's, Comox, Bagotville, Trenton, Gagetown, Cold Lake, Iqaluit and many other communities across this country. The Conservatives wrote political IOUs on DND's account which they cannot cash.

Just as in the Afghanistan debate, the Conservatives were shameful and shameless in their willingness to use the Canadian military as a political pawn. We cannot allow that to happen.

Our discussions as a Parliament, as a government and as Canadians on military matters must be civil and respectful. It is not unpatriotic, it is not disrespectful of our troops and it is not failing to support them to engage in these debates.

Our democratic principles and the fundamental principle of civilian political responsibility for our military demand that we must engage in this debate. Again, we support our troops.

We ask these questions and contemplate these decisions without fear that our patriotism or respect for the Canadian armed forces would ever be questioned. Anything less would be disrespectful of the freedom and liberty that 54 Canadians have died for in the line of duty and what they have died for in building and defending Afghanistan.

I stand in favour of this motion.

• (1705)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the mixed message that we are getting today from the Liberals. They keep saying over and over that they support the troops and that is great. They are the ones who actually sent the troops over there in the first place. I suppose their willingness now to say that we are going to pull them out and give notice right now is a contradiction, at least in my mind.

Business of Supply

Last Sunday I was at the Holocaust memorial remembrance. It impressed me to see the pain that those people are feeling a generation or two after the events of the Holocaust.

The people in Afghanistan right now are experiencing the same thing. I believe that we have an obligation and, indeed, even a privilege, as our troops did in World War II, to go there and to stand between victims and their oppressors. The tyrannical Taliban regime needs to be wiped out.

How can the Liberals and that member in particular justify even contemplating pulling out until the job is done? We need to ensure we are focused on the task, not on some arbitrary date on which we are simply going to say that we are pulling out. That would be to admit defeat in advance. In fact, I believe it would be, in a sense, planning that defeat and we ought not to do that.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, I believe the only confusion rests with the Conservatives in terms of their position on Afghanistan. It was the Conservative government that brought a motion before the House to extend the mission until February 2009. It was the Conservatives who received the consent of the House to stay until February 2009.

During the debate on that motion they made comments about why we should be there until 2009. It was definitive in their minds that we would be there until 2009. It was not until February 2010 or February 2011. The Conservatives put a motion before the House that said we want to extend the mission until February 2009.

It is now the Conservatives who do not know how long they want to be in Afghanistan. Is it for another five years, ten years or fifteen years? It is the Minister of National Defence who one day says that we will be there until February 2009 and then the next day says that we will be there until we see irreversible progress, whenever that is or however they define that.

It is not the Liberals who are confused about the mission. It is the Conservatives and that is why we brought this motion before the House.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the member supports a multi-pronged approach but there seems to be an apparent contradiction that I do not seem to understand.

On the one hand the member is supporting a multi-pronged approach but in the Liberal motion the Liberals are supporting the Conservative motion to extend the mission, which the Conservatives have embarked us on, and where Canadians will continue to pay the ultimate price in a futile and failing mission that is not multi-pronged.

On one hand, the Liberals want to continue this approach for the next two years but on the other hand the member says that he wants to have a multi-pronged approach. Could he explain that contradiction?

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, there is no contradiction. I would ask the member to read the motion very carefully and to go over the *Hansard* and read the comments by Liberal members. It is very clear that we are committed to the military mission until 2009. That was decided in this House and we will respect that. We have also said that diplomacy and development are other prongs that need to be continued. I do not believe that there is any contradiction whatsoever

in terms of this motion or in the position of the Liberal Party of Canada.

The only confusion rests with the Conservatives as to whether they want to pull out and stop our military portion of the mission in 2009 or whether they want to continue for another five or ten years.

• (1710)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Halifax will want to craft her remarks knowing that she will be interrupted at 5:15 p.m.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry to have so little time and to not be able to share my time with the member for Burnaby—Douglas who also had hoped to participate in the debate.

Let me say very briefly that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, I stood in the House as leader of the New Democratic Party and issued a plea that was being expressed around the world that the same values that cause us to be outraged and repulsed by the acts of barbarity of 9/11 guide us in our response to those horrible crimes. From that day to this, I have had ringing in my ears the words of a survivor of 9/11, who stated the following at the World Trade Center site:

As I silently remember my friends and co-workers who have perished, I know only this: If we fail to wage peace instead of war, if we do not learn to value all life as fervently as we value our own, then their deaths will mean nothing, and terror and violence will remain our dark companions.

I will never forget standing on the tarmac in Kandahar surrounded by troops, courageous men and women, who are doing what they have been asked and assigned to do on behalf of Canadians as members of the Canadian armed forces. They continue to do what is being asked of them to this day. A very tragic number of them have lost their lives.

Let me make it clear, as I once again issue a plea, that we understand we have to commit to participation in a comprehensive peace process. I issue the plea for the government to understand that if it continues to say that every Taliban is evil and the enemy and must be exterminated, it is going to continue to drive people into the arms of the Taliban as the loved ones of civilians, men, women and children, are killed in the attempt to defeat the Taliban.

The case has been made again and again by many with much broader experience than I that we must launch a comprehensive peace process, understanding that we must reach out to the moderate Taliban. We must understand that we will drive people into the arms of the Taliban if we continue to kill civilians, if we continue to ignore the fact that babies die because they are starving because we are directing more and more of our resources into expensive military equipment. Instead we should understand that the way to rebuild the lives of people in Afghanistan, which surely is what our commitment is supposed to be about, is to do what needs to be done to improve life conditions in that country.

We are so out of balance and we have so lost sight of that needing to be the path to peace that I and my colleagues cannot possibly commit to what the Liberals are proposing today, that we continue with two years of the flawed failing strategy that is condemned to fail in the mission.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, April 24, at 5:30 p.m.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, with the debate having collapsed, I think you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as being at 5:30 p.m., so we could proceed to private members' business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-278, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (benefits for illness, injury or quarantine), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau) Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday,

Adjournment Proceedings

April 25, 2007, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I recognize the fact that everybody is in the spirit of cooperation. We agreed to see the clock as 5:30 p.m. I am wondering with the indulgence of the House and the Chair if we could suspend the sitting for perhaps 10 minutes because we do have members who are en route to the House for the late show. They were doing television shows and other things and were unable to come to the House.

I would seek unanimous consent to suspend for 10 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am not experienced in suspending the House for the adjournment, but I suppose if we could get the unanimous consent of the House, the House can be the master of its own destiny.

Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 5:19 p.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 5:30 p.m.)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1730)

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, I asked a question in the House, directed to the Minister of National Defence. I will repeat it:

[English]

—in January the Military Police Complaints Commission received a complaint about allegations of abuses suffered by Afghan detainees captured in April 2006 by members of the Canadian Forces. As part of a regular National Defence policy, the minister [of national defence] was informed about the fate of these detainees in a confidential report. Why did the minister wait for months before investigating these reports?

The minister had the gall to say:

—all these various issues are under investigation. When the results come out, we will all learn the truth.

In my supplementary, I made it very clear that I did not ask “how many investigations there were”. I asked the minister “why it took him so long to start the investigations” when it was clear, under his department's policies, that he was informed that Canadian Forces had taken Afghan individuals, detained them, and had handed them over.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Chief of the Defence Staff submits reports directly to the minister about the transfer of Afghan detainees and about the health of these detainees. However, it took a complaint from an Ottawa professor to the Military Police Complaints Commission about the allegations of abuses allegedly suffered by Afghan detainees captured in 2006 to force an investigation.

My question, again, is why, having been briefed about the transfer of Afghan detainees and about the health of those detainees, did it take the minister so long before an investigation was launched? Why did it take a complaint from an Ottawa professor to the Military Police Complaints Commission before an investigation was launched? We all know that at one point DND attempted to block that investigation. There is a letter to that effect.

I cannot believe that the Conservative government, which prides itself on its so-called transparency and accountability, would not immediately institute an investigation as soon as the minister had received the report about the transfer of the Afghan detainees and about their health. That is the first thing. That is lesson A. That is A, B, C.

The second thing is that we already know that the minister has had to apologize to this House for misleading it. He had to stand in this House for misleading the House. It is shameful behaviour for a minister to mislead the House. Thankfully, he had sufficient honour to acknowledge that he misled the House and to apologize for it and correct the record.

I would now ask that the minister correct the record on this issue with regard to his frivolous answer, his non-answer, about why he took so long to have an investigation launched into the alleged abuses. I did not say abuses; I said alleged abuses of the Afghan detainees.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is in Afghanistan to assist the democratically elected government. This includes helping it improve its justice and security system as well as its detention system.

In keeping with this, the Government of Canada supports the principle that the Afghan authority should be responsible for handling detainees captured in its sovereign territory. Canada's policy to transfer detainees captured in Afghanistan to Afghan authorities is consistent with this principle.

It is Canadian policy to treat all detainees in accordance with the standards set out in the third Geneva convention, regardless of their status.

The protection of human rights is a central value to all Canadians and our government's commitment is to ensure it is upheld no matter where our forces serve.

In December 2005 Canada and the government of Afghanistan signed an arrangement which sets out general policy on the treatment and transfer of detainees, as well as notification procedures.

Specifically, the arrangement provides that the Afghan authorities will accept detainees who have been detained by the Canadian Forces and will be responsible for maintaining and safeguarding them.

Canada and Afghanistan will treat detainees in accordance with the standards set out in the third Geneva convention which provides for humane treatment as well as protection against violence, intimidation, reprisals and other unlawful acts.

Afghanistan and Canada will notify the International Committee of the Red Cross through appropriate national channels upon transferring a detainee.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has the right to visit detainees at any time while they are in the custody of the Canadian Forces or Afghanistan.

Once detainees are transferred to them, the Afghan authorities are responsible for maintaining and safeguarding detainees transferred to them and for ensuring the detainees are provided the protections of the humane treatment standards set out in the third Geneva convention. We fully expect the government of Afghanistan to live up to these expectations.

After being made aware of the allegations of abuse, the Canadian Forces launched a criminal investigation and a board of inquiry. Since then, two other investigations by the Military Police Complaints Commission have been opened. Therefore, there are three investigations and one inquiry into the treatment of detainees in Afghanistan ongoing at this time.

Of the three investigations, one is an independent police investigation being conducted by the National Investigation Service, and two investigations are being conducted by the Military Police Complaints Commission, an independent oversight body. There is also an internal Canadian Forces board of inquiry. In addition, the matter is before the federal court.

The investigations and the inquiry are progressing. The Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces are fully cooperating with those conducting these investigations.

Consistent with Canadian law, the results of these investigations and the inquiry will be made public when they are complete.

In addition to the December 2005 arrangement, which recognizes the legitimate role of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, in February 2007 this government formalized the relationship between Canada and the commission with regard to the transfer and monitoring of detainees.

Under this latter arrangement with the commission, the Canadian Forces notify the commission of any detainee transfers, and the commission undertakes to provide immediate notice to Canada should it learn that a transferred detainee has been mistreated.

● (1735)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I am simply astonished. In March 2007 the head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, the organization with which the Canadian Armed Forces signed a deal so that it would do the tracking of Afghan detainees that are handed over to the Afghan authorities and detained, said that it would do the actual surveillance and monitoring to ensure that detainees are not being tortured and they are not being abused.

Adjournment Proceedings

That head, Abdul Quadar Noorzai, told reporters that his commission is not in a position to do a whole lot since it has next to no staff, one of the provinces in Afghanistan is too dangerous to enter, and that his people have been denied access to prisons. So how can the Minister of National Defence stand in this House, as he has done repeatedly, to say that the Afghan detainees, people who were captured by our armed forces and then handed over to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, Canada can do more to foster the sustainable development of democratic institutions by helping Afghans to improve their own prison system, rather than by operating detention facilities.

Like our NATO allies, we believe that the best approach is to recognize the responsibility of the Afghan authorities regarding the treatment of detainees and to help them build that capacity in that regard.

That is why Canada is contributing to efforts to strengthen the rule of law in Afghanistan, including the support for comprehensive justice and security sector reform.

Canada has fielded corrections and police advisors to the UN assistance mission in Afghanistan since 2003 and we have engaged in a number of initiatives to support the judicial sector.

The Minister of Public Safety recently announced the deployment of 12 Canadian civilian police officers to help train and assist the Afghanistan national police. The recent deployment of these officers now brings the total number of Canadian civilian and military police in Afghanistan to 36.

• (1740)

[Translation]

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this adjournment debate and to express my concerns regarding the lack of funding provided by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency for the SEED capital program.

This program serves to help Atlantic Canadians acquire the business skills and capital they need to start, modernize and expand their businesses.

Entrepreneurs are vital engines of growth in the Atlantic area. In addition to creating job opportunities in all sectors, local entrepreneurs further stimulate the economic performance of all Atlantic regions. However, we know that the ACOA continues to cut funding to these programs.

Operating one's own business certainly has its rewards, but also has its challenges. For a business to reach its full potential, a certain number of elements must be mastered, including planning, finances and marketing.

Entrepreneurs in rural areas in the Atlantic region face the considerable challenge of funding.

Through ACOA programs, these people can get the funding they need for successful start-up. Many of them depend on ACOA's SEED capital program, which provides loans to start or improve a small business, as well as acquire business skills training.

In 2005-06, the SEED capital program was a real success. It provided \$6.3 million in loans— not grants, but repayable loans, and more than 469 of them—to New Brunswick entrepreneurs. Thanks to these loans and this funding, more than 663 jobs were created or maintained in New Brunswick. That is 663 jobs created or maintained in only one year.

However, ACOA recently reduced funding for this program and will only provide \$1.5 million in loans for 2006-07. This amount represents less than 25% of the total loans for the preceding year under this same program.

Since this government was elected, several projects have been refused or delayed simply because of funding.

For the second year in a row, the Conservatives did not even mention ACOA in their budget.

The previous Liberal government had invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the Atlantic region through ACOA programs. In the 2005 budget, my Liberal government devoted a complete section to the Atlantic region.

In 2005, the Liberals increased funding for regional economic development organizations such as ACOA by \$800 million.

I am asking the government to ensure that communities in Atlantic Canada will not be penalized owing to a lack of leadership by this government.

We know that small and medium-sized businesses are the lifeblood of Atlantic Canada. I am asking ACOA to take action in order to help Atlantic communities and business people whose development relies on funding programs.

Why did the minister abandon entrepreneurs and job creation in New Brunswick?

Will the minister continue to do so or will he restore the funding required for the seed capital program to continue providing assistance?

Entrepreneurs are not asking for charity. Entrepreneurs in Atlantic Canada and New Brunswick are demanding their fair share. They are not asking for grants. They are simply asking for loans to develop their businesses. But this government, this Conservative government, has completely destroyed this program.

This is a disastrous situation and we need to restore the program. I hope the government will listen to the Liberals.

[English]

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche for raising this issue and allowing me the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

It will no doubt interest the member that the Government of Canada, through ACOA, continues to focus on helping New Brunswickers succeed in business and in fact none of ACOA's programs have been cut.

Our government has recently approved \$2.7 million in additional funding for the seed capital program in New Brunswick. As a result, this important initiative will continue to be delivered by community business development corporations and community economic development agencies across the province including, the hon. member will be interested to know, the CBDC Madawaska and CBDC Victoria-Madawaska-South.

It might also interest the hon. member to know that funding under the seed capital is renewable. As funds are repaid, they return to the program allowing the community business development corporations and community economic development agencies to reinvest them in new and expanding businesses in their respective communities.

Coupled with the \$2.7 million in additional funding recently approved by our government, the seed capital program portfolio in New Brunswick today totals more than \$14 million. What we are talking about here is clearly not a cut in seed capital funding, but rather sound financial management.

Canada's new government is committed to accountability, and to getting things done for New Brunswickers and for all Canadians. We recognize clearly that small businesses have a major impact on our economy. In fact, small business has been responsible for 20% of all job gains in New Brunswick.

Our government understands that for these businesses to not only survive, but to thrive, they need an environment that encourages investment and innovation. Our government is committed to the creation of such an environment that will benefit generations of New Brunswickers to come.

Just last month the Minister of Finance tabled our government's second budget. The budget is focused on creating a stronger, safer and better Canada. Budget 2007 takes concrete action to improve our quality of life and ensure a strong, vibrant economy in New Brunswick and across Canada.

Budget 2007 focuses on creating five key advantages which include: a fiscal advantage, by eliminating Canada's total government net debt in less than a generation; an infrastructure advantage, by building the modern infrastructure we need, and I am sure the hon. member supports that for New Brunswick; a knowledge advantage, by creating the best educated and most skilled workforce in the world; a tax advantage, by reducing taxes for all Canadians and establishing the lowest tax rate on new business investment in the G-7; and as the hon. member alluded to, an entrepreneurial

advantage, by reducing unnecessary regulation and red tape, and increasing competition across the country.

This budget continues our work to restore the confidence of taxpayers by ensuring responsible financial management and most important of all, by keeping the economy strong.

● (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Conservative government does not understand the situation at all. The parliamentary secretary says that there was an announcement that \$2.7 million may be allocated over the coming year. However, he forgot to mention that during the Liberal government's last year—2005-06—nearly \$6.4 million was lent through the seed capital program. Now they are talking about \$2.7 million.

It is unacceptable for the government to provide so little money to Atlantic Canada entrepreneurs, to entrepreneurs in New Brunswick. They are not asking for handouts; they are asking for fair treatment. Cutting the program from \$6.4 million to \$2.7 million will certainly not help entrepreneurs in New Brunswick.

This is unacceptable for entrepreneurs and it is unacceptable for workers. This is about creating jobs and work for our people, but this government has completely failed to understand that.

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, it may not make the hon. member happy, but this new government is actually delivering for New Brunswickers in ways the old Liberal government never did and never would.

Canada's new government, through ACOA, and the member should listen carefully to this figure, has approved investments across New Brunswick of more than \$105 million. These investments have leveraged more than \$116 million in additional public and private sector funding, strengthening economic infrastructure and quality of life in communities across New Brunswick, including communities in his own riding of Madawaska—Restigouche and my riding of Fundy—Royal.

As a New Brunswicker, I am certainly proud of the record of this new government for restoring confidence in our communities and supporting innovation and investment in New Brunswick as well as all of Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:49 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, April 19, 2007

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Controlled Drugs and Substances Act

Mr. Warkentin	8411
Bill C-428. Introduction and first reading	8411
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	8411

Bank Act

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	8411
Bill C-429. Introduction and first reading	8411
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	8411

Criminal Code

Mr. Lemieux	8411
Bill C-430. Introduction and first reading	8411
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	8412

Petitions

Industry Canada

Mr. Breitreuz	8412
---------------------	------

Immigration

Ms. Chow	8412
----------------	------

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski	8412
--------------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition motion—Afghanistan

Mr. Coderre	8412
Motion	8412
Mrs. Redman	8412
Motion	8412
(Motion agreed to)	8412
Mr. Hawn	8414
Ms. Chow	8414
Mr. Dion	8415
Mr. Blaney	8416
Ms. McDonough	8416
Mr. Menzies	8417
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	8418
Ms. McDonough	8418
Mr. Hiebert	8419
Mr. Ignatieff	8420
Ms. McDonough	8421
Mr. Bachand	8421
Mr. Blaney	8424
Ms. Beaumier	8424
Ms. Chow	8424
Mr. Casson	8425
Mr. Layton	8425
Mr. Chong	8426
Mr. Brown (Barrie)	8427

Ms. Black	8427
Mr. Blaney	8428
Mr. Chong	8429
Mr. Dhaliwal	8429
Ms. Black	8430
Mr. Obhrai	8430
Ms. Keeper	8430
Mr. Brown (Barrie)	8432
Mr. Bevington	8432
Mr. Hiebert	8432
Mr. Sorenson	8432
Mr. Coderre	8434
Mr. Bevington	8434
Mr. Hill	8434
Mr. Cannis	8436
Ms. McDonough	8436
Mr. Alghabra	8437
Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	8438
Ms. McDonough	8438
Mr. Wilfert	8438
Mr. Chong	8440
Mr. Dewar	8440
Ms. Lalonde	8441
Mr. Obhrai	8442
Mr. Ouellet	8442

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Youth Exchanges Canada

Mr. Petit	8442
-----------------	------

Saint-Quentin Arc-en-ciel Choir

Mr. D'Amours	8442
--------------------	------

Roger Gibb

Ms. Bourgeois	8443
---------------------	------

The Environment

Mrs. Mathysen	8443
---------------------	------

Residential Schools Settlement

Mr. Bruinooge	8443
---------------------	------

The Environment

Mr. Simard	8443
------------------	------

Air Force Appreciation Day

Mr. Hawn	8444
----------------	------

Earth Day

Ms. Picard	8444
------------------	------

AHEPA Canada

Mr. Abbott	8444
------------------	------

Sikhism

Mr. Malhi	8444
-----------------	------

Brent Poland

Mrs. Davidson	8444
---------------------	------

Trade	
Mr. Comartin	8445
Hearing Impaired	
Mr. Turner	8445
National Volunteer Week	
Mr. Lessard	8445
Human Rights	
Mr. Alghabra	8445
Brian Mulroney	
Mr. Blaney	8446

ORAL QUESTIONS

Afghanistan	
Mr. Dion	8446
Mr. Harper	8446
Mr. Dion	8446
Mr. Harper	8446
Mr. Dion	8446
Mr. Harper	8446
Mr. Ignatieff	8446
Mr. O'Connor	8447
Mr. Ignatieff	8447
Mr. O'Connor	8447
The Environment	
Mr. Duceppe	8447
Mr. Harper	8447
Mr. Duceppe	8447
Mr. Harper	8447
Mr. Bigras	8447
Mr. Baird	8447
Mr. Bigras	8447
Mr. Baird	8447
Mr. Layton	8447
Mr. Harper	8447
Mr. Layton	8448
Mr. Harper	8448
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. McTeague	8448
Mr. MacKay	8448
Mr. McTeague	8448
Mr. MacKay	8448
Mr. Wilfert	8448
Mr. MacKay	8448
Mr. Wilfert	8449
Mr. MacKay	8449
Benamer Benatta	
Ms. Faillie	8449
Mr. Day	8449
Ms. Faillie	8449
Mr. Day	8449
Softwood Lumber	
Mr. Cardin	8449
Mr. Bernier	8449
Mr. Cardin	8449

Mr. Bernier	8449
Ms. Fry	8449
Mr. Menzies	8450
Ms. Fry	8450
Mr. Menzies	8450
Equalization	
Mr. Simms	8450
Mr. Flaherty	8450
Mr. Simms	8450
Mr. Flaherty	8450
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Van Kesteren	8450
Mr. MacKay	8450
Mr. Marston	8450
Mr. MacKay	8451
Mr. Marston	8451
Mr. MacKay	8451
The Environment	
Mr. McGuinty	8451
Mr. Baird	8451
Mr. McGuinty	8451
Mr. Baird	8451
Mr. Rodriguez	8452
Mr. Baird	8452
Mr. Rodriguez	8452
Mr. Baird	8452
Quebec City	
Mr. Guimond	8452
Ms. Oda	8452
Fisheries and Oceans	
Mr. Blais	8452
Mr. Hearn	8452
Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation	
Mr. Simard	8452
Mr. Hearn	8453
The Environment	
Mr. Del Mastro	8453
Mr. Baird	8453
Softwood Lumber	
Mr. Julian	8453
Mr. Menzies	8453
Mr. Julian	8453
Mr. Menzies	8453
Fisheries and Oceans	
Mr. MacAulay	8453
Mr. Hearn	8453
Democratic Reform	
Mr. Epp	8453
Mr. Van Loan	8454
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	8454
Business of the House	
Mr. Goodale	8454

Mr. Van Loan	8454
Points of Order	
Bill C-52—Budget Implementation Act, 2007	
Mr. Van Loan	8454
Ethics Commissioner	
Mr. Obhrai	8456

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition motion—Afghanistan

Motion	8457
Mr. Bouchard	8457
Mr. Chong	8458
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	8459
Mr. Cannis	8459
Ms. Savoie	8460
Mr. Blaney	8461
Mr. Eyking	8461
Mr. Carrie	8462
Mr. Chong	8463
Mr. Calkins	8463
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	8465
Ms. McDonough	8465
Mr. Hawn	8466
Ms. Guarnieri	8467
Ms. Savoie	8468

Mr. Bélanger	8468
Mr. Blaney	8469
Ms. McDonough	8470
Mr. Russell	8470
Mr. Epp	8471
Ms. Savoie	8472
Ms. McDonough	8472
Division on motion deferred	8473

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Employment Insurance Act

Bill C-278. Report stage	8473
Mr. Eyking	8473
Motion for concurrence	8473
Division on motion deferred	8473
(The sitting of the House was suspended at 5:19 p.m.) ..	8473
Sitting Resumed	
(The House resumed at 5:30 p.m.)	8473

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Afghanistan

Mrs. Jennings	8473
Mr. MacKenzie	8474

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency

Mr. D'Amours	8475
Mr. Moore (Fundy Royal)	8475

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Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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