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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 11 petitions.

* * *

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

CANADA CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY ACT

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-52, An Act respecting the safety of consumer products.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present yet another income trust broken promise petition on behalf of a large number of my own constituents in Mississauga South. The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over

\$25 billion of the hard-earned savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

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

CANADA STUDENT LOANS

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a number of petitions on behalf of Canadian students and their families who are facing crushing levels of debt notwithstanding the very welcome creation of a grant program by the government in the last budget.

The petitioners feel very strongly that the government has not gone far enough to address the debt levels. The petitioners are asking the government to reduce the federal student interest, or to at least give a nod in that direction, and to create an ombudsperson to help them navigate the many problems in the Canada student loan system.

•(1005)

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition to present on behalf of many seniors who are faced with paying for a mistake made by Statistics Canada. It made a major error in its calculations of the consumer price index and it resulted in Canada's inflation numbers being underrated by half a percentage point from 2001 to 2006.

The petitioners are asking the government to take responsibility for this error and to repay every Canadian who was shortchanged by the government program because of this miscalculation.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present today containing the signatures of numerous people across Canada. The petitioners are calling on the government to continue its good work on fighting human trafficking.

The petitioners are cognizant of the fact that it is a growing crime here in Canada and want to make sure that the government and all members of this House continue to combat this horrendous crime.

*Points of Order***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ROYAL RECOMMENDATION—BILL C-445 AND BILL C-490

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to speak to the question of the need for a royal recommendation on two private members' bills.

On March 11, 2008, you noted that the spending provisions in two private members' bills appear to infringe on the financial initiative of the Crown. You invited members to make arguments on whether those bills require a royal recommendation. That is what I intend to do at this time.

The two bills are Bill C-445, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for loss of retirement income), and Bill C-490, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (application for supplement, retroactive payments and other amendments).

Let me begin with Bill C-445. This bill would create a new refundable tax credit for the loss of retirement income.

Refundable credits are direct benefits paid to individuals regardless of whether tax is owed or not and are paid out of the consolidated revenue fund. As a result, any legislative proposal to create a refundable tax credit requires a royal recommendation.

I would draw to the attention of the House two recent rulings wherein the Speaker of the House and the Speaker of the Senate concluded that creating or increasing a refundable tax credit requires a royal recommendation.

On June 4, 2007, there was a Speaker's ruling that a proposed amendment to Bill C-52 to create a refundable tax credit could not be selected for report stage because the amendment required a royal recommendation.

On May 11, 2006, the Speaker of the Senate ruled that Bill S-212 was out of order because it would have increased a refundable tax credit. The Speaker of the Senate stated:

—bills proposing to alter refundable tax credits need a Royal Recommendation.

This is because the payouts that will be made to taxpayers, who are entitled to claim them, must be authorized. This authorization is the Royal Recommendation. These payments can only be made from the Consolidated Revenue Fund; they are expenditures of public money.

Since Bill C-445 would create a refundable tax credit, it needs to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

Now, in regard to Bill C-490, this bill proposes a number of changes to the old age security program which would result in

increased spending and would therefore require a royal recommendation.

Clause 1 of Bill C-490 would apply to a person who ceases to have a spouse or common law partner because of the spouse's or common law partner's death and would provide that person with the old age security pension that would have been payable to the person's spouse or common law partner, for a period of six months. This extension of benefits would be a new program requirement, which would result in additional spending.

On December 8, 2004, a Speaker's ruling in the case of Bill C-278 concluded that a similar extension of benefits for the employment insurance program constituted a new and additional requirement for spending, and therefore required a royal recommendation.

Clause 2 of Bill C-490 would eliminate the requirement to make an application for a supplement for old age security benefits. Formal application is needed since the information available from the Canada Revenue Agency is sometimes insufficient to determine eligibility. This change would result in benefits under the old age security program being provided to persons who otherwise would not be eligible to receive them. This would be a new program requirement that would require additional spending.

On October 24, 2005, a Speaker's ruling with respect to a provision in Bill C-301, dealing with other proposed retroactive payments under the old age security program, concluded that:

Bill C-301...proposes to alter the process by which compensation is awarded to old age security recipients in the manner that retroactivity is handled.

Clauses 2, 3 and 4 remove the requirement that the recipient must make an application before they can receive a payment...This changes the conditions of the compensation process and creates new or additional spending.

Clause 3 of Bill C-490 would increase the guaranteed income supplement monthly benefit by \$110. The Department of Human Resources and Social Development estimates that this change could cost up to \$2 billion a year. This would constitute additional spending for a new and distinct purpose and would therefore require a royal recommendation.

Clause 6 of Bill C-490 would provide for retroactive payments where a person has not received a supplement, or a portion of a supplement, to which that person would have been entitled under the act.

On October 24, 2005, a Speaker's ruling on the retroactivity of payments in the case of Bill C-301, respecting the monthly guaranteed income supplement under the Old Age Security Act, concluded that:

—retroactivity is limited by the date upon which the application was made. Late applicants may only be eligible for the period dating from the application. It would appear then that this modification authorizes increased spending which would require a royal recommendation.

● (1010)

The Department of Human Resources and Social Development estimates that Bill C-490's provision of unlimited retroactivity for guaranteed income supplement monthly benefits could represent an initial lump sum payment to beneficiaries of up to \$6 billion.

Business of Supply

In conclusion, Bill C-490 would result in increased spending for the old age security program in the new and distinct ways I have just outlined. The bill therefore requires a royal recommendation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the comments of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. Before you make a ruling, I seek your permission to allow the Bloc Québécois to comment at a later time. We are still interpreting the Standing Orders. We would get back to the House as quickly as possible. I ask for your usual understanding.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord for his comments. As the member knows, after hearing arguments such as the ones made by the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, I am certain that the members who introduced these bills in the House would like the opportunity to present their arguments in response.

[*English*]

I will certainly consider the matter in due course. I will wait to hear further argument on it, and if it comes from the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, fine, I look forward to it.

We will have further discussion on this, I am sure, before the Chair renders a ruling, but I thank the hon. government House leader for his able arguments. I am sure he enjoyed reading all those rulings.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.) moved:

That a special committee, consisting of 12 members, be appointed to consider the Canadian mission in Afghanistan as referred to in the motion adopted by the House on March 13, 2008 (Government Business No. 5); that the committee have all of the powers of a Standing Committee as provided in the Standing Orders; and that the members to serve on the said committee be appointed by the Whip of each party depositing with the Clerk of the House a list of his or her party's members of the committee, providing that each party shall have the same number of members on the committee as it now has on the standing committees and provided that the said lists shall be deposited with the Clerk no later than April 10, 2008.

He said: Mr. Speaker, with the consent of the House, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Richmond Hill.

I cannot help but note, Mr. Speaker, as you take your seat, and members in the House should know this, but the person who is now occupying the Speaker's chair was at one-time my seatmate many years ago and it was a wonderful experience. I fear I may have driven you out of the House, Mr. Speaker, but I want you to know, sir, that my recognition of your great talents, your oratory and your commitment to the people of Winnipeg remains outstanding. I want to continue to express those thoughts, whatever way partisanship may have taken us over the last while.

The purpose of this motion is to set up a committee, which was called for by the motion that was passed by the House a few weeks ago.

It is rather extraordinary that the official opposition is having to use one of its opposition days in order to get the House to do its business. It says something about the government that we have today to actually implement the motion that was agreed to by the House. It has been left to us to put forward this motion because the government has simply sat on its hands.

The current government ran on transparency and accountability. There is no issue upon which transparency and accountability are more important than our efforts in our mission in Afghanistan.

Just last week we heard the tragic news of the passing of yet another soldier in the line of duty. This is a war among the people in Afghanistan which has taken over 80 Canadian lives, in which many other soldiers have been killed from other NATO countries and in which literally thousands of Afghan citizens have lost their lives.

It is, without question, the most sweeping commitment that Canada has made to an international military struggle since the Korean War. It is an effort that has taxed all of our commitments in terms of the military, the political, the diplomatic and the aid mission that we have in Afghanistan.

It was clear to us that if there was ever an issue on which we would have expected the government to want to be transparent and accountable, it was the mission in Afghanistan.

Instead, I regret to say that we have not had the kind of leadership from the government with respect to the mission in informing and advising the Canadian people on what is going on.

I borrow the words of General Sir Rupert Smith when he described this war, as others, as a different kind of war, as a war among the people, increasingly the kind of struggle in which Canada and other countries will be engaged over the next while.

These are difficult conflicts. They are difficult to participate in and often difficult to see the resolution of. Experts from around the world have been talking about the struggle in Afghanistan in ways that tell us that the easy solutions are simply not there, that we cannot simply go on rhetoric, that we cannot simply go on saying that we support the troops or not. We need to have an understanding of the difficulties and challenges that are facing, not only our troops but our aid workers and our diplomats.

It is our view in the Liberal Party that the House itself must take much greater control and much greater interest in what is taking place in Afghanistan on a detailed basis. We need to hear from a range of experts on an ongoing basis in terms of what is happening. We need to tell Canadians what the challenges facing this mission are and how we will succeed.

We need benchmarks to tell us how we are doing. We need to share this information with the people of Canada and we need to recognize that without their support, their knowledge and their participation this will be increasingly difficult for us to sustain. That is the purpose of our motion.

Business of Supply

•(1015)

I know there have been some discussions with the government with respect to some proposals for effecting some changes to the motion, which the member for Richmond Hill will be referring to, but in terms of the substance of the mission, I want to refer to a few short issues that need to be addressed.

The first issue is that this is a different kind of struggle. It is a war among the people and it requires a different set of strategies and a different set of skills than the ones we have at present.

•(1020)

[*Translation*]

The second issue is that the border with Pakistan is open, and there are some very important insurgent bases not in Afghanistan, but in Pakistan. This requires a different response from the government and NATO. We have no choice; this is not like any other war. There are major differences that we must understand and discuss.

The third issue is that Afghanistan now has a narco-economy that is increasingly reliant on the sale of opium. It is estimated that more than 50% of Afghanistan's economy is dependent on an illegal industry. The drug industry leads to violence and corruption, and allows a special class that is very close with Afghanistan's political leaders to get richer. This is a huge problem for us. But this situation has not really been discussed in the House, and we have not had a frank discussion with Canadians.

[*English*]

Finally, we need to recognize that this is not simply a military struggle like others. As Mr. Manley has said, there will not be a simple military solution to this challenge that we face in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, our objective is stability. Our objective is to create sufficient stability and capacity in the government of Afghanistan that it can take full responsibility for its own security.

What we face is a situation where right now we are not fully aware of all the circumstances that would lead us to say that this is the progress we are making toward that stability and these are the benchmarks that we are reaching.

I will close where I started by saying simply this. It is, to put it mildly, a little unusual for an official opposition to come back to the House and say to the government that this is what it said it would do and this is why it is important.

I can recall watching the Prime Minister on television, together with millions of Canadians, talk extensively about transparency and accountability. I must say that I am not impressed with how the government has responded to the need for that very transparency and accountability in the House.

We see committees that are not able to work. We see a government that resists, at every step of the way, any form of inquiry into issues that are clearly matters of public importance. We see a government that is simply not prepared to take its responsibilities in an open, frank and fully democratic manner with respect to the work of the House of Commons.

Nothing is more important for Canada than this mission. These are our men and women who are putting their lives at risk. Nothing is more significant for this country at this moment than what we are trying to do in Afghanistan. We should be setting the test in the House for how well and how effectively we can cooperate. We need to find information and share it, which can lead to a better and a more successful mission than we have seen so far.

That is our objective and that is what we are striving to do, which is why the Liberal Party has taken an opposition day today to do just that. We should do no less for the women and men who have sacrificed their lives and those who are now facing the great challenges and difficulties on the line in Afghanistan.

We need to do our job and, frankly, the government needs to give the House the means to do the job. I hope very much that if the motion passes we will begin to get the kind of information, the kind of accountability and the kind of transparency that Canadians want in the management of a mission of this kind.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the new member of Parliament on his recent victory. He recently joined the foreign affairs committee and is now saying that nothing has been going on. It seems strange to me that when new Liberal members of Parliament come into the House they forget all the work that has been done in the past.

I would like to advise the new member of Parliament and his colleague from Richmond Hill, who also sits on the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, that for the last six months the committee has been doing an in-depth study on the mission in Afghanistan. We have heard from all the witnesses who he has talked about. We even heard from the Manley panel, a panel that was appointed by the Prime Minister. We have been doing that for a long time. We have had two days of debate here.

It is not right for the member to stand and say that there was no accountability and no debate. We had two nights of debate in this Parliament and the foreign affairs committee is about to issue its report. For the new member to say that this government has not done anything, I would tell him that if he were to talk to his colleagues he would actually find out that a lot of work has been done by Parliament and by this government to bring accountability and transparency.

•(1025)

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I heard an interrogatory in that comment.

Hon. Peter MacKay: It's questions and comments.

Hon. Bob Rae: I hear the minister and I am glad that he is here.

Mr. Speaker, obviously, I have read whatever reports have been made available.

I was at the committee last week where there was much less progress made than I would have anticipated in a committee. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs did not seem to want the committee to do its job. He did not seem to want the committee to reach conclusions or come to any votes. It seems to be a bit of a pattern among members of the Conservative Party.

Business of Supply

The resolution was passed before the middle of March but the government came forward with no plans to implement the committee. The Prime Minister did not take time yesterday and, so far as I am aware, has not taken time to make a full report to Parliament with respect to what has taken place.

If we look, for example, at the conduct of other great conflicts, there have always been times and places where the government of the day took special opportunity to lay out in front of the House of Commons exactly what was going on, exactly what was taking place and the nature of the challenges that were under way.

Of course much work has been done. No one is saying that no work has been done. All we are saying is that the House called for the establishment of a special committee on Afghanistan but until we moved the motion and indicated last week that we were surprised that the government had not been forthcoming, the government clearly was not intending to proceed with the establishment of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the new member. The last time he introduced a motion in the House, it brought down the government. We can hope for the same result today.

He referred to Afghanistan as a new kind of war, a different kind of war, involving civil war, open borders with Pakistan and a drug industry. I have a question for the member. In spite of his comments and his understanding of the problem, his party has aligned with the government, even though this government is continuing to apply the same old solutions to a completely new situation. We can see now that Canada is allying itself more with the American forces, which are fighting the drug industry in a totally unacceptable way.

I am wondering whether the member has an answer to this question.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the situation right now is such that we agree not only with the government, but also with the UN about extending the mission. We agree with all the countries that signed the agreement on Afghanistan, all the NATO and UN countries that are working to create stability in Afghanistan. That does not mean that it is not possible to have a good discussion, a good debate on the situation, a productive sharing of ideas and views on how we can make acceptable progress to create stability in Afghanistan.

The problem I have with the NDP's position at present is, to put in plainly, that the NDP is all alone. All the social democratic parties in Europe are in favour of the mission in Afghanistan. The Norwegians are there, the Swedes are there, the French are there. The Europeans are there, and they accept their responsibilities. The only social democratic party in NATO that does not accept the need to work responsibly and effectively on the issue of Afghanistan is, sadly, the NDP in Canada. All the other social democratic parties recognize that there is a need for stability and for security forces to provide that stability.

• (1030)

[*English*]

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate today. On March 13, we passed a motion in this House to change this mission, to make it more than military, and to have a firm, fixed end date. In that motion we said that we needed accountability and transparency when it came to dealing with the mission in Afghanistan. It was absolutely critical that we have accountability in terms of what is happening there, establishing those benchmarks.

It has been almost a month and we still do not have from that resolution the establishment of the special all party committee to deal with this mission. In the motion which we put had put forth, and 95% of the motion was adopted by this side of the House, it spoke about accountability, bringing the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of International Cooperation and officials from time to time to respond to issues regarding this important mission. This is a Canadian mission with a Canadian motion that was adopted by the House.

It is important that parliamentarians are able to hold the government accountable with regard to the mission, to understand where we are going in this mission, to be able to review the laws and procedures governing this mission, to make sure that Canadians understand what is happening out there, and that through Parliament we are able to do that because it is this Parliament that is supreme in terms of that accountability.

Unfortunately, almost a month has gone by and we have not had that established. I am hoping later in my remarks to put an amendment forward to help actualize that special committee.

It is critical that when we talk about the mission in Afghanistan, we want to talk more about the issues dealing with diplomacy, working with our allies in the region to ensure that it is not simply as we said during the debates in this House, simply a military mission. We said we need to focus on the areas of training, particularly in terms of the Afghan national army and the Afghan national police.

We need to ensure that the Afghans at some point will be able to shoulder the burden in dealing with the situation in that country. In order to do that, training is absolutely critical and we said that we would do that. After February 2009, Canada will be there to assist in this very important mission along with our NATO partners.

There is no question that in order for Parliament to be engaged we said that a all party special committee needs to be formed in order to look at the progress, to set those benchmarks, and to understand where we are in the area of dealing with diplomacy, in terms of areas of development. What kind of aid are we providing there? How effective is that aid?

If we build a clinic, it is not just the building that is important. It is ensuring that we have the people trained to wash the floors, do the laundry, to ensure that they can provide basic medical services to people. So the whole package is taken care of. We need to see where we are on these types of issues. Therefore, the special committee is extremely important.

Business of Supply

I would point out that after some reflection I am going to propose on behalf of our party an amendment because last week on Wednesday we wrote the government to say that the special committee needed to be established. On Thursday, in a question in the House under routine proceedings, we asked about this special committee and on Friday we put it on the order paper.

I would like to propose the following amendment to the motion. I move:

That the motion be amended by replacing all the words after the words "That a special committee" with "be appointed to consider the Canadian mission in Afghanistan as referred to in the motion adopted by the House on March 13, 2008, Government Business No. 5, consisting of 13 members which shall include six members from the government party, four members from the official opposition, two members from the Bloc Québécois and one member from the New Democratic Party, provided that the chair shall be from the government party; that in addition to the chair, there shall be one vice-chair from each of the opposition parties; that the committee have all of the powers of a standing committee as provided in the Standing Orders; that the members to serve on the said committee be appointed by the whip of each party depositing with the Clerk of the House a list of his or her party's members of the committee no later than April 10, 2008; that the quorum of the special committee be seven members for any proceedings, provided that at least a member of the opposition and of the government party be present; that membership substitutions be permitted to be made from time to time, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2).

• (1035)

I put that amendment forward in the spirit again—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. member moving the amendment?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Then that is the end of the debate.

It is also 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. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Toronto Centre, if I could get his attention, if he consents to this amendment being moved. He does.

The table has had some advance notice of the amendment and the amendment is in order.

We will now proceed to questions and comments on the somewhat truncated speech by the hon. member for Richmond Hill.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member was on the foreign affairs committee with me and served for awhile with me. I would like him to tell his new colleague, who was saying that the committee does not function, that the committee functions very well. Just because the new member showed up one day to speak at the committee and the agenda did not go according to him, it does not mean that the committee does not work.

I want to advise the new hon. member that the motion he is talking about was passed. Of course, he will not show up at the committee because that is not where he will get his leadership campaign running for the Liberal Party. The former leader of the NDP wants to run for the leadership for the Liberal Party and it will not happen.

Going back to the hon. member's question, let me say this. We had two nights of debate in this House on the issue of Afghanistan during the time when the motion was presented. I want to ask him where the members of the Liberal Party were to debate that. Today they are standing and saying that they need a debate, yet on those two nights when there was a debate in this House on Afghanistan, all Liberal members were absent. It was only the Conservative Party that was debating that motion.

Where were the Liberal members and why are they now saying there was no debate?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on the member's memory, but I will point out to the member that what we are talking about today is simply actualizing what was in those 30 hours of debate.

What we are doing today is putting forward a motion, which the government accepted on March 13, which establishes the special committee dealing with accountability and transparency on Afghanistan. What we are doing is putting forward the motion to say that this has to be established, so I am not sure what the member is saying.

The issue of the 30 hours of debate has absolutely nothing to do now with the fact that we passed a resolution. We now expect it to be acted upon. In order to act upon it, one of the provisions, and if the member's memory is a little unclear he can read it again, talks about the establishment of this committee. That is all we are doing, nothing more and nothing less.

• (1040)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has become clear that committees are sliding into partisan paralysis, the environment committee, the defence committee, all of the committees, and it is costing taxpayers quite a significant amount of money. We on this side of the House believe very strongly that we should hold the government accountable on the decisions to extend the mission with the same old traditional war-making approach.

My question to the member opposite it this. If none of the committees are working, or few of them, why would setting up yet another committee, where the Liberal Party is not holding the government accountable, be an effective measure?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, it may depend on the committee. I am on the defence committee and after my first day there, it seems to be working fine. It is up to members to ensure that they work in a collaborative spirit.

With respect to the establishment of a special committee, this is what the House passed. Canadians expect us to work together effectively, to evaluate the mission, to demonstrate leadership with regard to the mission, and to call the appropriate ministers to the committee, so it will work.

We keep talking about how things do not work. Why are we not talking about working together? We should be talking about our men and women who are doing the work in the field. There is nothing more important than ensuring their safety. In order for us to understand what is going on and how we can be more effective in our support, the special committee which the majority of the House agreed to needs to go forward.

Business of Supply

In the spirit of cooperation, I and my party intend to make the committee work when it is established. We want to make sure it is established as quickly as possible so that we can get on with the job.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary East.

I want to welcome the member for Toronto Centre to this issue and to the House.

I would acknowledge as well the member for Richmond Hill, who is now the critic in this matter. He has indicated he is going to be making positive contributions to the defence committee. We certainly take him at his word and hope that is the case.

With respect to the amendment that has been moved and the motion itself, I can indicate on behalf of the government that we accept this. I understand discussions have taken place that have brought us to a consensus on this. The reality is that the government is completely in accordance with this issue. We had a motion before the House of Commons that was accepted and supported by members opposite that included a reference to this committee. Therefore, I say to the members opposite, welcome to a parade in progress. This is an issue on which we are obviously intending to move. It is as if they have gone to the window, seen that it is snowing and predicted that it will snow.

Moving to the substance of the issue itself, Canada certainly has a long and proud history in standing up for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. That tradition, Mr. Speaker, as you know as a student of history, goes from Vimy to Normandy to Kandahar to Haiti. We will continue to take part in the great issues and causes of our time.

As Canadians this is something we proudly embrace, no more so than the men and women of the Canadian Forces who give effect to decisions that we take in this place, who very much respond appropriately, who bring glory to our country with their actions. They are at the very sharp end of the stick when it comes to the implementation and the export, so to speak, of the values that Canadians hold dear and share with other democratic countries. That demonstration of embracing these values was very much on display in Romania and Bucharest at the NATO summit last week.

We believe as well that the great advantages we enjoy as Canadians go very much hand in hand with great responsibilities. It is said that those who have much have great responsibility to share it. In fact, this is very much a sentiment that Canadians embrace.

We are seeing that goodwill extended to the people of Afghanistan in this UN backed, NATO led democratic government of Afghanistan's request for assistance in this mission. We are extending that helping hand to a government that requested Canada's assistance there and our continued presence, which is again implicit in the decision that was taken by this place.

Throughout the years, we have worked closely with friends and allies to live up to those responsibilities that we find implicit in our people and culture. Our participation in the UN mandated, NATO led Afghanistan mission is the latest chapter in this legacy.

It is the most important undertaking we have within the international community today, both on the humanitarian side, as well as the military contribution. It is hugely important to the Canadian Forces, to CIDA workers, to our diplomats and our embassy in Afghanistan that we continue in our efforts on development, the promotion of democracy and certainly the stability that flows from the presence of our military and that of our allies.

In light of this, it is also clear that the mission requires the most careful scrutiny by parliamentarians, which is again very much implicit in what we see presented here today by a consensus that is building. Parliamentarians on that committee will have an opportunity to access information, to hear from witnesses.

As was quoted by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, this process is well under way. I have calculated the number of times that I have appeared, as well as my predecessor, as well as ministers of CIDA and foreign affairs. We have appeared some 17 times before parliamentary committees since coming to office. We saw over 30 hours of debate just in the last presentation around Afghanistan.

There is no one who could suggest that we have not had opportunity on the floor of the House of Commons to discuss the issues around Afghanistan. That culminated in a vote, supported by the members opposite. There was a previous vote as well, I would remind members.

●(1045)

On two separate occasions there has been debate and a vote, something which, I am quick to add, and I remind the member for Toronto Centre, did not occur when the mission began. Granted that was a time when he was probably still contemplating his future with respect to coming here. I know that he was then a member, or at least philosophically a member of the party that he lashes out at now with vitriol. I happen to agree with his assessment, quite frankly, but this conversion has occurred and there is nothing like the vehemence and righteousness of a recent convert.

Now the member opposite is suggesting somehow upon his recent arrival that this will bring great light to this issue. We hope it will but the reality is this parade is very much in progress. This debate has been before Canadians and certainly been before the House of Commons for some time. I add to that, as I mentioned earlier, there was a vote. There was an actual consultation resulting in a vote. That did not occur under the member's new party, the Liberal Party opposite. When the Liberals were in government when the mission began, there was no vote. The Liberals can spare us the lectures, the condemnation and the feigned indignation that somehow they are holier than thou on the subject of consultation with the House. It did not occur.

In light of that fact, as I suggested the previous government, of which the member opposite who is yapping now was a member, did not have a vote in the House of Commons. I remind him that it warms the cockles of my heart to point out that hypocrisy. He can yap all he likes and light us up with his enlightened view but that member knows that he did not have the vote when he was in government.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

During the past year, there have also been numerous other debates in the House of Commons about this mission. Last June, after an exhaustive study, the Standing Committee on National Defence produced a report on the Canadian Forces' mission in Afghanistan.

In January of this year, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development tabled a preliminary report on the mission. The committee is continuing its study. It was also in January that the independent panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan tabled its long-awaited report.

● (1050)

[English]

The government has been paying close attention to the House, the debates, the reports, the questions and the deliberations. We are already acting on what has been put forward. We are acting on the recommendations. For example, we have established a new cabinet committee on Afghanistan to consider diplomatic, defence, development and security issues that relate to the mission. That is being led by the member from Vancouver.

We are requesting additional support with respect to troops and equipment. That was met in NATO. We continue to have discussions with respect to the necessary equipments, most important, the helicopters and UAVs.

There is no question that the mission is tremendously complex and faces enormous challenges still. We know there are no short term fixes or simple remedies as some would suggest. Last week in Romania, President Karzai himself described his country as not a country that was destitute or a country that was in rebuilding. He said that it was a country that was destroyed. It is a very telling commentary from the president of Afghanistan.

The steady progress that we have seen, however, is reason for hope. Since the start of the mission, and it has picked up pace and reaching a tipping point, we are seeing a continued commitment from ISAF nations, which was evidenced at the Bucharest summit.

Canada is one of 40 countries working together with the elected government of Afghanistan to bring about lasting stability and security. As I have said many times, we are there because this is a virtue for our country. It is an advantage to our country to see stability emerge and remain in that country.

Like the rest of the international community in Afghanistan, our engagement in the country is wide-ranging. It is development and security, which goes hand in hand. While it includes 2,500 men and women in uniform, Canada's presence there also includes diplomats, development workers, police officers and many others from other departments, including border officials. We have a battle group ready to provide security. We have a provincial reconstruction team to work on the development and reconstruction projects.

We are working closely with the Afghanistan government itself to address some of the internal governance problems that it continues to face. We have operational mentoring and liaison teams to work directly with the Afghan National Security Force and police to augment and continue to build the type of force, which will eventually lead to their ability to provide their own security.

We have a strategic advisory team in place in Kabul working with the Afghan government. We are responding to the recommendations of the independent panel, led by the former deputy leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. Manley, with greater transparency and disclosures to ensure that Canadians are informed and advised as to the developments as they occur.

I note again the sacrifice of the men and women who are there, the men and women in uniform who give effect to this mission. They cannot and should not be forgotten. We will accept today, in a repatriation service at CFB Trenton, the body of Terry John Street, the latest casualty. I will be there with the Governor General at that sombre occasion.

Canadians can never forget and will never cease to appreciate and to express the sincere gratitude of our nation for those tremendous contributions that are made today throughout Afghanistan. We should never stray from that fact. We can speak here, we can discuss in an open forum, in a diplomatic and democratic forum, only as a result of those contributions and that willingness of men and women to put on the uniform and stand strong for those very values that we hold so dear.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of reports over the last while. Most recently, in a statement by the head of the Central Intelligence Agency in the United States, he said that he was convinced there was a substantial presence of al-Qaeda still in the border territory and that the support for the Taliban insurgency was both financial and military as well as ideological in Pakistan.

Could the minister keep the House up to date on that question?

● (1055)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite will know that tremendous information sharing goes on between nations such as Canada. He will also be aware that there are certainly continued concerns about the support network that exists inside Pakistan, the recruiting that is going on, the supplying of equipment and, most notable, the materials that are being used to construct the IED's being placed on roads in places throughout the country, which are having a devastating effect in Kandahar province and in areas near Ma'sum Ghar, Panjwai and Zhari district.

There have to be even greater collaborative efforts to address this, and this has to include the government of Pakistan. We are waiting with anticipation, as is the international community, to see what effect the recent changes in government there will have on that country's ability to bring greater focus and greater effect to thwarting the efforts of both al-Qaeda and the Taliban, who operate within that country, most notable in the Hindu Kush area.

It is my hope that the member opposite will bring something to the table as far as his insights and perspectives on what we can do as a nation and what contributions we can make to try to do our level best to turn back those efforts and keep the Taliban and al-Qaeda impact from continuing to foil attempts at stability and peace inside Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians, and certainly parliamentarians in the House, would be hard pressed to find an example of a greater global success than the respectful leadership that the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence portrayed to the world in representing Canada at the recent NATO conference.

I want to congratulate the minister and the Prime Minister for what I found to be an extremely proud moment, which was under-reported in the media here at home. Internationally, we were praised for pretty much rewriting some of our NATO commitments and bringing that entire faction together.

We have heard calls from the NDP to basically cut and run and leave Afghan folks in the midst of these al-Qaeda terrorists. Are we getting close to the point where the security of that nation can be left to the nation of Afghanistan itself?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, that is the abiding question. At what point in time will the Afghans be able to defend their own borders, defend their sovereignty and have sufficient national security forces to protect their population?

There is something very incongruent about the position of the NDP and others who have suggested that by withdrawing our forces, by having the international mission abandoned, development could somehow continue.

I and others who have been to the country have witnessed first-hand the appearance of roads, bridges, irrigation systems and dams, which are able to generate electricity. Programs are in place for the vaccination of children. Education is beginning to flourish. Six million more children are at school today and a large portion of those are girls, who were forbidden from an education previously.

The disconnect that exists in the minds of some is hard to understand in this day and age, given the plethora of information available showing that security is the enabler for the development that is taking place in Afghanistan.

Yes, more work has to be done. We have seen a significant increase in the capacity of the Afghan army to recruit. It is now in excess of 60,000 and growing. We see the type of professionalism that will be required within its ranks to have a lasting impact. We see a commitment to democracy that Afghans themselves will never want to abandon. We see a certain pride and purpose develop within both the Afghan security forces and the people themselves that will bode very well for their future.

We hope to see a miraculous turnaround that will lead to what I think will be quite a historic accomplishment. Not many years ago Croatia was a recipient of NATO forces in an effort to bring peace and security to that country. It is now making contributions to an international mission like what we are seeing in Afghanistan. This is a shining example of what can happen and an example of the hope that exists in the country today.

• (1100)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once more, it is a pleasure for me to rise to speak to the issue of Afghanistan. I do not know how many times I have risen in the House to speak to it.

At this time, I want to take the opportunity say that current Minister of National Defence and former minister of foreign affairs has been very active on this file.

My colleague, the member for Richmond Hill, talked about selective memory and the transparency of this government. Contrary to what he has said, the current Minister of National Defence and former foreign minister appeared before the committee. The Minister of International Cooperation appeared before the committee. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Sport appeared before the committee. There has been openness and transparency.

I am a little concerned. I ask the foreign affairs critic for the Liberal Party to ensure that the committee to be formed does not duplicate the work the foreign affairs committee has done and continues to do. The foreign affairs committee is coming to the final stages of issuing a report, so much so that even General Hillier will be attending before the committee very soon to give his testimony to complete the hearing on the mission in Afghanistan.

We do not want the new committee to revisit what has already been done in foreign affairs committee. It is in the process of completing a report. When we go in camera to do that report, I hope the new foreign affairs critic of the Liberal Party will attend the foreign affairs committee and have input in the report. I hope he does not ignore the report. His attitude at the foreign affairs committee is that of a great knight who has come to save Canada. I do not think he will participate much in the foreign affairs committee because that is not the vehicle he would use for his leadership campaign.

I hope that is not his attitude as a member of the foreign affairs committee. I hope he will fulfill and take the opportunity presented to him to have input in the report, so the report will have some credibility.

The concern I have always had with the partisan politics in committee. The foreign affairs committee, with the Liberal support, brought an interim report forward to Parliament. Why it would want to do that, I do not know. It achieved nothing. We have these reports on the mission being pushed forward, but in the process, we are losing sight of what we have been hearing from people and witnesses. I hope this is taken into account by the proposed new committee.

As the Minister of National Defence has said, we will support the motion, but we will move forward and not backward, built on the basis of the report and recommendations to be submitted by the foreign affairs committee to the Parliament of Canada. I hope that is taken into account.

Today we are here to talk once more about Afghanistan and the great progress that has been made there. Since 2001, after the fall of the Taliban, Afghans came together to choose a new democratic system of government, and support of this system has been very strong.

Free and fair presidential elections were held in 2004. Over 10 million Afghans registered to vote in these elections. Under the Taliban, women were banned from public life. Now women hold 27% of the seats in the Parliament of Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

We were honoured to host a visit to Canada by six Afghan women parliamentarians just a few months ago, and what an impression they made. All of us who had the opportunity to meet with them were taken aback by their dedication and determination to make Afghanistan a better place. If nothing else, it is a sign of hope.

Perhaps the concern most often expressed about progress in Afghanistan is the continuing issue of the security situation in some parts of the country. Sadly, Canada knows this all too well. Our engagement in Afghanistan has cost the lives of 82 soldiers and one diplomat, mainly in the Kandahar province. The Minister of National Defence said he would be attending a repatriation service for one of our soldiers who lost his life. I and all members in the House mourn his death and send condolences to his family.

• (1105)

Thankfully, however, Kandahar is very much the exception and not the rule in Afghanistan. Some recent statistics presented by ISAF at the recent NATO summit tell the story. In 2007, 70% of security incidents occurred in just 10% of Afghanistan's districts, which are home to less than 6% of the total population. Insofar as 2008 is concerned, 91% of insurgent activity is confined to just 8% of all districts in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the capacity of Afghan security forces grows daily. The Afghan national army is beginning to participate in joint operations with ISAF across the east and the south and is increasingly taking the lead. Canadian OMLTs, operational mentor liaison teams, continue their good work with the Afghan battalions in Kandahar.

Afghan national police training is also ramping up, both nationwide and in Kandahar. The international community has recognized the importance of this element and is dedicating new resources to the task. We all recognize that long term stability and security will come only when Afghan forces can do the job and international troops can be withdrawn.

Also, I should mention that there have been real signs of progress in Afghanistan on demining action. Through a combination of education and mine clearance, there has been a 55% reduction in the monthly victim levels in the last six years. Over 520,000 anti-personnel mines have been destroyed and over 1.3 billion square metres of land have been cleared, freeing them up for travel, agriculture and other productive purposes.

In this short time, I have been able to touch on a few signs of progress in Afghanistan. Of course, that country is not yet where it wants to be, and no one pretends that it is. The challenges that remain are surely significant. There is much work to be done in supporting and sustaining the development of Afghan capabilities in all areas. That is why the international community's assistance and presence will still be required in Afghanistan in the years to come, just as it has been in every other post-conflict society in the modern era.

My point, however, is that progress is most assuredly possible in Afghanistan. Afghanistan today is headed in the right direction. Canada will continue to stand by the people of Afghanistan on their road to progress.

In conclusion, I want to say, as I have stated, that I have been fortunate enough to participate in this debate in the capacity of parliamentary secretary on numerous occasions. I want to tell my hon. colleagues on the other side that it is not the case that there has been no transparency or no debate. There has been transparency and there has been debate and a lot of other issues have come forward. As the Prime Minister has said, now our main focus and job is to train the Afghan people so the Afghan people can take their country to the destiny they envision for their own land. Canada is there just to help.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): This is a pretty simple motion, Mr. Speaker. It is exceedingly simple. The real question for the parliamentary secretary is whether he supports the creation of the committee as contemplated in the March motion that was passed by a majority of this House. It is not complex. Does he or does he not support the motion?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member did not hear my speech. I said in my speech that, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of National Defence said, we would be supporting the intent of this motion, and we will be supporting the amendment that has come forward because we believe in transparency, as the Prime Minister has said.

We believe in accountability. The motion, as passed, talks about it. However, my concern, and this is what I said at the beginning of my speech, is that we must build on what has been done by the foreign affairs committee and by the extensive study over there. I hope this committee will not duplicate the work of that committee, because then we would have not achieved that.

As for transparency, debate and everything, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence have been very clear. We will be continuing to do so. Again, if the member needs to know, yes, we will be supporting this motion.

• (1110)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP's position on Afghanistan has been crudely misrepresented by the minister and earlier by the member for Toronto Centre.

We believe that Canada has a very important role in building peace in Afghanistan, and not up to an arbitrary date, but for as long as it will take. What the NDP is asking for, though, is for a UN-led rather than a NATO-led process. Unlike NATO, the UN's explicit mandate is to preserve and promote international peace and security.

Therefore, I have a question for the parliamentary secretary. In his opinion, are UN agencies, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Development Programme and the Peacebuilding Commission, involved presently? Has the government involved them presently in helping to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the NDP for this question, because as I see it, the question makes the point about where the NDP stands, which is confusing for everyone in Canada. One moment the NDP members want a withdrawal. One moment they want to continue working there. One moment they want to talk to the Taliban. In the next moment they want to talk with some other peacekeeping forces out there, but we do not know who they are.

Business of Supply

Perhaps the member could look at it this way. This is a UN mandated mission. This is not a NATO mandated mission. This is a UN mandated mission and the UN has given this authority to NATO, but it is sanctioned by the UN, by the world community. Under the UN banner, there are over 60 nations working there. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed a UN envoy to Afghanistan to ensure that the UN presence over there is giving legitimacy to this operation to ensure that the people of Afghanistan are successful.

Yes, in response to the question of the hon. member, I hope she will understand that this is not a NATO mission. This is a UN mandated mission carried out by NATO at the request of the UN.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, we clearly understand that the mission is under a UN mandate. My question was not about whether it is under a UN mandate. It was about the fact that we in the NDP believe that it should be a UN-led mission, not a NATO-led one, and the hon. member did not answer my question.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, the Security Council has passed a resolution. If the Security Council wants to lead this mission, it is for the Security Council and the UN, not the NDP, to decide how this will happen.

However, since it is a UN decision on who will lead the mission, then I do not understand what problem the NDP has about whether or not it is a UN-led mission. It is a mission driven by the UN. It is for the UN to decide how it wants to carry out this mission. Canada will abide by that decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not think it will surprise anyone in this House if, from the outset, I say that the Bloc Québécois will be in favour of the motion and the amendment we are discussing.

It is very simple. The Bloc Québécois has always believed that an empty-chair policy is quite possibly the worst of all policies. We also feel that we are the voice of Quebecers in this debate. Therefore, it is important to occupy the chairs that we have been given in order to try and have an impact on what is happening in Afghanistan. As you know, the Bloc Québécois has always taken part in this debate, since the beginning, and has always tried to represent the views of Quebecers accurately.

The other day, I heard the Prime Minister say that there was support for the mission in Afghanistan. I can state that, in terms of Quebec, that is definitely not the case. The Prime Minister needs to know that. I do not know what survey he can cite. However, I can say that in Quebec, the mission in Afghanistan is not at all popular, and we are here to express that opinion.

I do not want to go through everything that has happened; I do that every time we have a debate on Afghanistan. I just want to say that we have always been consistent in this debate. At first we supported this mission because we supported the three D policy: diplomacy, development and defence, or the military aspect. Unfortunately, this policy has not been respected.

It has even been said that the mission in Afghanistan has been diverted to the military aspect. Everyone is now saying that this conflict cannot be won militarily, but can be won with the two other Ds, namely diplomacy and development. This will be the focus of

my discussion this morning with the hon. members of the House of Commons and with you, Mr. Speaker.

I also hear my Conservative colleagues say that the Conservative government is an example of transparency. I would say it is quite the contrary and we have a lot of examples to back that claim. It is really too bad that this debate did not take place among the Conservative ranks. Why is no one standing up and saying that as parliamentarians we have the right to be fully informed? Having all the facts would greatly help the type of debate we are having today. But we do not. This government has a culture of secrecy. It hides absolutely everything from parliamentarians.

And yet—and I have always said this—the 308 parliamentarians in this House all have one thing in common: they have been democratically elected by the electorate. Every member of Parliament has received the majority of votes to represent one of the parties of Canada and Quebec. We should therefore be treated fairly equally. That is not what is happening. I maintain there is a lack of transparency and I have some examples. The case of the detainees in Afghanistan is probably the best example.

Is it right to learn through the *Globe and Mail* or *La Presse* that the government stopped transferring detainees weeks earlier? No, it is not right. Faced with the evidence, the government or the minister responsible should have made a ministerial statement at least to say that detainees were no longer being transferred. However, that is not what happened. Again, we learned this through the media. There are many more examples.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs returned from Bucharest last week. He invited journalists to a briefing. Members of the Bloc and our research service asked if parliamentarians could attend. The answer was no. We constantly have to speak out about the importance of information to Canadian parliamentarians. This is what has always worried me: we have to wonder how much control Parliament has over the important files we have to deal with nowadays—not just the war in Afghanistan, but all of the issues.

Afghanistan is certainly one of those issues. And it does not make sense to me that members of Parliament are left in the dark while others are given the opportunity to attend these briefings.

•(1115)

Transparency is an even bigger problem on the institutional side of things. There is a big problem between the House of Commons and National Defence. Things are different elsewhere. Things might be different if we were in the United States. We may not always be on the same wavelength as the Americans, but things work differently in their committees. For example, the defence committee, the Armed Services Committee, in both the Senate and Congress, influences the national defence budget. Unfortunately, we here do not get to put in our two cents' worth. We are told that a budget will be tabled on such-and-such a date, but nobody knows what is in it, and that might just be the way it is. The minister announces what is in the budget, and as a committee, we do not really have a say in the matter.

Business of Supply

There is also a problem with transparency within the department. We fought tooth and nail on the Standing Committee on National Defence—and I was made critic—to ask for briefings, which were refused by the previous minister. Only when the minister was brought before the committee was he convinced that we did not wish to know the operational plans for the coming weeks. We knew that would be dangerous for the military. All we wanted was to have an overview of what had been done in the weeks before the briefing.

Thus, a general would meet with us once per month and would tell us all kinds of nonsense. I lost my temper with him in committee. We were shown photographs of C-17 aircraft landing at Kandahar. Is that what we want to know? No. We wanted to know what military operations had taken place, if schools, wells, roads and other infrastructure were being built and if diplomacy was working in Afghanistan. For the time being, all of that is being kept from us.

It is important that we have this information. I would even say that sometimes, as is the case with American or British defence committees, classified information may be required. We know the implications of classified information. Even if a pack of journalists is waiting for the members at the door, we are not about to say what classified information was divulged to the committee. However, at certain times, this would be appropriate. Some thought should be given to this.

When we have a debate on the terms of reference of the committee and the mandate it wants, the Bloc Québécois may consider the possibility of using classified information for certain presentations to the committee. I have already tried and had my knuckles rapped. It was out of the question. If we want to obtain real information then we should consider doing it. We have some time to think about it before the committee is convened.

As everyone knows, our party line has been consistent from the beginning. We have been asking and continue to ask that the mission in Afghanistan end in 2009, unlike the Liberals, who had been calling for the same thing and then at the last minute decided to jump on the Conservative bandwagon and extend the mission until 2011. This is extremely unpopular in Quebec, and probably in Canada.

Why did Canada not consider the basic solution of rotation? Canada currently has the highest mortality rate among soldiers there, because our soldiers are located in southern Afghanistan. The cardinal points are indeed extremely important in Afghanistan. I have been there twice, once in the north with NATO officials from Germany and once in Kandahar with the Standing Committee on National Defence. The state of affairs is completely different in the north than it is in the south. In the north, the Germans told us that at 8 p.m., everyone must return to camp. Their government requires them to return to their camp when illegal activities begin at 8 p.m. The opposite is true in the south. Our Canadian soldiers go out at night to try to stop the illegal activities of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Thus, it is very different.

Why did Canada not tell NATO that, since we have been there for quite some time, it is now time for another country to relieve us? We have paid a heavy price, in terms of both the lives of Canadian soldiers lost and monetary costs.

●(1120)

I believe that the war in Afghanistan is costing the public treasury \$3 million per day. Now the mission has been extended until 2011. That is going to be a huge bill, and that is not counting all of the military purchases the government is making because of its position and presence in Afghanistan.

Yet all is not doom and gloom for the Canadian government. The fact is that NATO has to discuss these issues and has not yet done so, especially when it comes to its strategic framework and its approach to intervention.

Before the fall of the Berlin wall, it was clear that we had to take on the people on the east side of the wall—Russia and all of its satellite countries. Now that is no longer the case. I go to NATO regularly, and I can tell that NATO is looking for a mission. It is not easy, because every time someone talks about a strategic framework or bringing in a new member, there has to be consensus.

Today, NATO has 26 member countries, but in the beginning, there were just 10 or so. It is not easy for 26 countries to achieve consensus. What is Canada's position in NATO? What is Canada's position on the new European Security and Defence Policy?

There seems to be some indecision. Indecisive officials go to Bucharest or other European capitals for NATO meetings, but they are reluctant to take a stand. Yet there is a fundamental problem: there is a growing rift, and this may not always be a bad thing.

There are just as many NATO forces in North America as there are in Europe. This is a bridge, a transatlantic relationship. There have been problems: Americans and Canadians have often been called on to intervene in Europe, and not just during the last world war. Think of Bosnia and Kosovo, for example. Canada and the United States were involved in those places, in those theatres of operation.

In a way, we do not really have a problem with countries wanting to come up with their own policies to resolve problems in Europe. However, we do have a problem with people wanting to divide NATO into two separate blocs. Some in NATO want that to happen. During NATO deliberations, I have often said that if Canada was asked which side of the ocean it is on, I get the sense that because Canada cannot be geographically relocated, we would have no choice but to stay with the Americans. We are not about to side with the Europeans on the other side of the pond.

In Canada's defence, I must say there is a problem. For instance, we do not like bilateralism with the Americans. I see Canada aligning itself only with the Americans and it seems to me that the reigning philosophy of this war is militaristic in nature.

Let us look at the conditions needed to keep Canadian troops in Afghanistan. It was a question of another 1,000 soldiers. Incidentally, based on simple, mathematical calculations, in the end, it would mean 2,200 fewer soldiers because another 3,200 American soldiers will soon be leaving. They will leave 1,000 soldiers on the ground. However, from our perspective, our 1,000 soldiers would be added to the 3,200 soldiers. More pressure should have been put on the U.S. Secretary of Defence to keep them there, but that was not done.

The approach is therefore military in nature: soldiers, helicopters, UAVs—that is, unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones—and we hear almost nothing about reconstruction or diplomacy. Yet that is what is needed.

From our perspective, there is no way we in the Bloc Québécois can sit here like statues, right now and after 2009, letting the government do as it pleases. We will continue to demand that the mission be rebalanced. It is unacceptable to want to resolve this on the American side or the Canadian side. As I have often said, the Canadian dove is long gone. We now have a Canadian eagle perched on the same branch as the American eagle.

This government is proposing a militaristic approach and we do not agree with it. Many people are saying that it does not make sense, that this cannot be resolved through military action and that the other two Ds in the three D policy must be developed more, for they are crucial.

Is it acceptable that nine dollars are spent on the military aspect for every dollar invested in development? It is acceptable that there are about a dozen diplomats in Afghanistan and 2,500 soldiers? Where is diplomacy in all this? When will anyone begin to imagine that a Taliban group might be ready to lay down their weapons and that negotiations might be possible?

• (1125)

But if we try to negotiate with bazookas, if we try to win over the hearts and minds of the Afghan people with 45-tonne tanks, and if we try to gain their confidence by bombing their towns as part of the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom, we will not succeed. The Bloc Québécois and I are not the only ones to say this. The international community is questioning it as well.

Unfortunately, Canada is taking the same position as the Americans and adopting the American attitude in Afghanistan—the same attitude they have taken in Iraq. We are on the wrong track. The Bloc will continue to work on this, to ask for more money for development and to ask the minister for CIDA to ensure there is accountability.

It is not right that when someone comes to tell CIDA workers in Afghanistan that he wants to dig a well in his town, he is told “Yes, that is a good idea. How much would you like for your well?” The person replies, “We want \$15,000.” So he is told, “Great. Here is a cheque. Go ahead.”

No one goes to see whether the well has been dug. Furthermore, it is clear that digging a well in Afghanistan does not cost \$15,000. It costs from \$1,000 to \$2,000. The same thing happens with roads. We are building roads; when buying gravel we pay ridiculously high prices, and the people there are getting it for a fraction of the price that we pay. So there is a problem with CIDA. People are not being held accountable, and they need to be.

There is not enough diplomacy. It needs to be present. We have called for an international conference. The Afghanistan compact was signed in 2006. Perhaps it is time to sit down with the 60 countries that are active in Afghanistan, and not just militarily. Many countries that are not part of NATO are nonetheless on the ground, although they are not active militarily. There are even countries like Japan, which is the second largest provider of funds, after the United States.

Business of Supply

Yet Japan is not promoting military action, but development and diplomacy. This is the path we must take, starting now.

There are many other problems in Afghanistan. Poppy growing is another terrible problem. Once again, the American approach is to do away with poppy cultivation. This is not a workable solution. Eradicating opium in Afghanistan drives the Afghans into the arms of the Taliban, who give them protection and offer to buy what they produce. NATO and the European Union have begun discussing how to solve this problem. The solution is simple: have the farmers grow different crops.

Some people will say that Afghans cannot grow cucumbers and tomatoes because their market is not large enough and they lack the road infrastructure to ship produce all over the country. Discussions are under way about reserving markets. Why does Canada not take the lead on this? Why does Canada not take the bull by the horns and say to the European Union, “Reserve a market for them. Take the market for Afghan cucumbers or tomatoes, encourage them and open up part of your market.” This would be more difficult for us in North America because of the distances involved, but it would be feasible in Europe. Discussions are under way.

This is a much better solution than eradication. When you tell a farmer and his family to stop growing opium and start growing something else that you are going to buy, you are on the right track.

What are opium and poppies doing? They are causing incredible corruption within the government. They are the main factors fuelling the insurgency in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are financed by poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. This problem cannot be solved directly.

In conclusion, it is also important to bring the countries in the region into the picture. Everyone knows that the border with Pakistan is too porous. There are major players that must also be involved. The Bloc will pay close attention to developments in this committee and will continue to represent Quebecers' values and interests in this debate. We support the motion, and I invite my colleagues to vote in favour of the motion and the amendment.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue and I will be standing in favour of the special committee proposed in a motion that was passed by this House previously on our role in Afghanistan. As the Prime Minister said, it was a Canadian motion, not a Conservative motion, a Liberal motion or any other party's motion. It was one for all Canadians in the very important role we are playing in Afghanistan.

I appreciated the member's comments. I do not agree with many of them, but that is fair. That is part of why we are in debate, but I want to correct the member's comments particularly on transparency and accountability of this government.

Business of Supply

This government has had over 16 technical briefings in the two years that we have been government. Under the Liberals there was one. We have had two votes in this House of Commons, one with 30 hours of debate. We did not have any under the Liberal government. Our ministers of defence have been at committee, with over 17 appearances, and have been accountable and transparent on what we are doing. My understanding is that this may have happened once or twice with the previous government.

My point, and I will be happy to hear the comments back from the hon. member from the Bloc, is that this government is taking transparency and accountability very seriously, not on just this issue but on all issues. In particular, on this issue since the member brought it up. We have been much more transparent and much more accountable than the previous government. We think it is important to Canadians.

In my newsletters to my constituents I have put in an article about Afghanistan at least three times of the six “Upfronts” that I have sent out. It is very important to us. We are doing the job and I would appreciate any comments that the member may have on the work that this government is doing to make sure that Canadians are informed of what we are doing in Afghanistan.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for the way he spoke. Instead of his rhetoric that we are used to hearing, he was informative. I will respond to him in the same way that he asked me his question.

I would like my colleague to ask himself, as an individual who is proud to have been elected in one of the 308 Canadian ridings, if he has all of the necessary information to exercise parliamentary oversight of this operation. I think that he will say no. He will most likely reply that there are briefings—and I especially liked that he mentioned the number of briefings that have taken place. However, it depends on what type of information is being given during these briefings. That is the problem.

In my opinion, the Conservative Party itself is realizing the problem in how their message is being delivered to Canadians. I read recently that they want to change their approach and avoid saying that we are at war with the Taliban. They want to move towards a more positive approach. That is proof that this kind of debate needs to take place and we need the relevant information when we have the debate. The government must offer as much relevant information as possible to the people who will be part of this committee so that they can exercise oversight.

I believe that parliamentary oversight is important in a country. Parliaments exist for a reason. The people trust their representatives there, and we must defend the people. Access to relevant information remains our principal tool in doing that. Otherwise, the impression is that we are being manipulated or that public opinion is being manipulated, things gets out of hand, and then citizens are not satisfied with the information they are getting from their parliament. Hence it is important to have parliamentary oversight.

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too listened very carefully to the comments of my colleague from Saint-Jean. We sit on the defence committee together and often have very pertinent questions to ask the witnesses who appear at committee.

In fact, it was my colleague from Saint-Jean who presented a motion to the standing committee that we have the monthly briefings from the Department of National Defence on the mission in Afghanistan. I share with him the frustration, although he has expressed it much more colourfully in committee than I have, with the lack of information that we receive.

Often what we get is information that can be picked up on the DND website. I think members of Parliament deserve more thoughtful and informative presentations than we receive on an issue so important as this war in Afghanistan.

My specific question for the member for Saint-Jean deals with the increased number of American forces that will now be reinforcing the Canadian contingent in Kandahar province. I have raised concerns at committee about the 13,000 American troops that operate outside the ISAF mandate, the 13,000 Americans who are operating in Afghanistan and more specifically in southern Afghanistan through Operation Enduring Freedom.

I would like to hear from the member for Saint-Jean his opinion of those two missions that operate concurrently, although not together, and whether he shares my concerns about the situation in Kandahar escalating when there will be probably more aerial bombings and more loss of civilian live. How does that feed into the growing insurgency in southern Afghanistan?

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague who is a very active participant on the Standing Committee on National Defence. We are both concerned by developments in the military operations in Afghanistan.

During NATO meetings, I posed this same question to General McNeil, who was responsible for all NATO forces in Afghanistan. I told him that, from my perspective, there was the risk that the NATO-led mission would diverge from the American “Operation Enduring Freedom”. Several times, villages were bombed and NATO was unaware that the bombings were going to take place.

We know that a large number of Americans are stationed in the east where “Operation Enduring Freedom” is underway. We will have to see the reaction in Kandahar when the Canadian soldiers arrive. Will the Canadian command retain control? Will it ensure that its command philosophy is actually followed by the American GIs? We must ask ourselves these questions.

Business of Supply

I agree with my colleague: this may lead to a rift and uncertainty that may in turn lead to unwarranted bombings that will turn the Afghan people against NATO forces. When a village is bombed and people are killed, the Canadian soldiers who arrive the next day offering chocolate bars are not well received. Once again, this leads to uprisings. People who have lost family members or friends do not look favourably on armed forces that they consider to be occupation forces.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member who asked the first question invited the member to discuss the government's transparency and accountability, not only in this committee which he addressed but in other forums in Parliament. I would like the member to accept that invitation and answer.

In particular, it is very hard to take when the Conservatives have written a book on how to thwart democracy in committees and how to thwart transparency.

The Conservatives have been shutting down all sorts of committees lately. A good example is the justice committee where the Bloc has a motion and the chair has walked out three or four times simply because the Conservatives do not want to study something that may have an effect on the Conservative Party.

I would like the member to answer that invitation regarding the Conservative Party and its lack of accountability and transparency in other forums other than defence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. The fundamental problem with the Conservative Party is that it has not accepted its minority situation. The Conservatives must realize that they are a minority government. This usually means that when the opposition parties get together, the power changes sides. I think that the public likes this situation. In the past, they have experienced arrogant majority governments that stall work for four years and do not listen because they know that they have a majority and that all their members will vote as directed by the minister or prime minister.

This is a good example. The Conservative government must accept that it is in the minority and stop stalling committee work. Because who is stalling committee work? It is not the opposition. Who systematically blocks committee work? Who monopolizes the time and makes never-ending outrageous speeches? The government.

I urge the government to recognize that it is in a minority situation and that it must abide by the democratic decision of the people. This is how the people want it, and they want the opposition parties to run the show, in committee and in the House, if they are able to work together.

• (1145)

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Ottawa Centre.

New Democrats will be voting in favour of this motion, but clearly, this is not a motion about Afghanistan or about Canada's role in the world. This motion does not speak to the 82 soldiers who have died in Afghanistan, nor to the one diplomat who died in service to Canada in Afghanistan. It does not speak to the hundreds of people who have been wounded, nor to those who may lose their lives in the future in Afghanistan. This is a motion about House affairs and the constitution of a special committee of the House of Commons. However, we do support the creation of a special committee of the House. We want the committee to look carefully into the mission. I hope that it can begin meeting very soon.

One of the main objectives of this committee will be to attempt to gather information and views on what is actually happening in Afghanistan today. Since the last election, I and members of the Standing Committee on National Defence and many others have attempted to get accurate information about the mission in Afghanistan, but we have been told over and over again that we cannot receive this information because of the requirements of national security.

My colleague from Saint-Jean moved a motion in committee in 2006 requesting that the Department of National Defence provide the standing committee with regular briefings on the status of the mission in Afghanistan. Some of the information from those briefings has been useful, but more often than not, the information was simply taken off the department's website.

Of course, it should go without saying that we do not want information to be disseminated by either the government or members of the House that would endanger the safety of the Canadian Forces or soldiers of allied states. That is not something anyone in the House wants to see happen and yet that is the answer we often get when we ask for information about the mission in Afghanistan. We do not want that risk taken. No one in the House wants that kind of risk to be taken.

What Canadians and members of Parliament in the House want is frank, clear and accurate information about the mission. This Parliament voted for the mission and, therefore, this Parliament should be responsible for evaluating whether or not progress is being made.

We need independent information to fairly evaluate the mission. Already, through public sources, we know that things are not going very well. From the UN 2007 fall assessment, and I will read some quotes from it, rates of insurgent and terrorist violence are at least 20% higher than they were in 2006.

Humanitarian access has become a growing challenge. At least 78 districts have been rated by the United Nations as extremely risky and, therefore, inaccessible to UN agencies. The delivery of humanitarian assistance has also become increasingly dangerous. Access to food has actually decreased, owing to the deteriorating security situation and poor infrastructure.

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We need independent information to be able to evaluate claims that are made by the government. We have called for and continue to support increasing transparency and the ability to report on this mission. Hopefully, this committee will fulfill that role and the government will be able to share with committee members and, therefore, all Canadians accurate information on the mission in Kandahar. What we do not support is the government pouring millions more dollars into a deceptive advertising or PR campaign.

There is more independent analysis available in the public realm. In December 2007 the UN calculated that in the nine months previous, violent incidents in the south had risen by 30%, with over 5,000 local deaths in the region. In February 2008 Canadian Major-General Marc Lessard, the NATO commander in the south, stated that violent incidents in the six southern provinces increased by 50% in 2007. In February 2008, NATO statistics revealed insurgent attacks had risen 64% in the past year, from about 4,500 incidents in 2006 to about 7,400 in 2007.

• (1150)

If the government wishes to call these conclusions into doubt, it should introduce information in the House or in committee that can be fairly evaluated. That has not been happening over the course of the two years that I have been involved here or on the national defence committee. When I have asked for information at the Standing Committee on National Defence or through orders of the House, it has been withheld because of section 15 of the Access to Information Act which deals with international affairs and defence.

According to the Access to Information Act, the government can “withhold information, the disclosure of which could reasonably be expected to be injurious to the context of international affairs, the defence of Canada or any state allied or associated with Canada or the detection, prevention, or suppression of subversive or hostile activities”.

The Information Commissioner of Canada made findings and recommendations on this section of the act in his annual reports of 1995, 1996, 1997 and 2000, and yet no changes have been made to the law. Mr. Bryden, who was both a Liberal and a Conservative MP, proposed changes to section 15 through a private member's bill which would have allowed that exemption only for current operations.

The Access to Information Act has not been amended since 1985. Since that time, technology has changed, the handling of information has changed, and even the types of threats that we face have change dramatically. It is well past time that the act be brought up to date.

There are a couple of procedures existing right now to challenge the exemptions. An individual can appeal to the Information Commissioner and if that appeal is unsuccessful, the individual can appeal to the Federal Court.

The Information Commissioner has stated that because of systematic underfunding of the access to information office and a rise in the use of exemptions by the heads of government institutions, his office is totally backlogged.

My own experience is that it can take up to a year to receive incomplete information released by a department and then another full year for the commissioner to make a determination on it. Once

the Information Commissioner has spent a year looking at a complaint, if the government agency decides not to follow the recommendations of the commissioner, the only route then is to appeal to the Federal Court and then to higher courts. All in all, just trying to get information could conceivably take four years or more.

Is that how we really want information about the mission in Afghanistan to be handled? Do we have to tear every bit of information from the government through the courts? Is that the only avenue open to us? If so, it is totally unacceptable and this has to be remedied.

If the Prime Minister is really serious about the promise he made in the last election about having Parliament meaningfully involved in foreign policy and military questions, then there must be a greater culture of openness.

Today I received from the Department of National Defence a response to an ATI request that I made. The department is asking for another extension of 300 days, almost a year. It tells me that I can expect to receive a response to my request on or before January 23, 2009. And half the time, the answer is incomplete.

The committee on the Afghanistan mission should be investigating the lack of access to information from the government. I hope the committee will take on that challenge.

All of us in the House need to work together to make this committee work. I sincerely hope that once the committee is formed, it will be a venue which Parliament is intended to be, where open dialogue and debate will take place. It is incumbent upon all members to allow views to be expressed in a respectful manner even if one view does not conform with another. Half of the Canadian population has very serious concerns about this mission in Afghanistan.

I call upon members of the committee to ensure that there is productive debate that will serve well the people of Canada.

• (1155)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her intervention as a defence critic. However, her speech gives this false idea to the Canadian public that her party is in favour of the mission in Afghanistan. Nothing could be further from the truth. The NDP voted against the motion. The NDP voted against everything about Afghanistan. That party is now talking as if its members are the ones who were responsible for passing the motion. Let us make it very clear what the NDP position is. The NDP's position is that it is opposed to this motion and, therefore, to this whole idea.

In talking about transparency and parliamentary oversight, maybe she should talk to her party's critic, who is sitting behind her. There is a parliamentary committee looking into the issue of Afghanistan and her foreign affairs critic has the right in the parliamentary committee to call all the witnesses that party wants to hear from. We have not stopped the witnesses from coming in front of the committee to give testimony. There is parliamentary oversight. There is a committee right now undergoing a study of Afghanistan, with full participation of all members of Parliament.

At the same time, there has been full debate and the NDP has been very vocal. I must say that contrary to the Bloc and the Liberals who never showed up for those two nights of debate, the NDP members were here and they expressed their point of view, with which we do not agree and will never agree, but they were here to put forward their point of view, as opposed to the other two parties.

I want to tell them that there has been a debate. There has been transparency.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I am a bit puzzled by some of the comments that my colleague has made. We have been very clear, and at the beginning of my comments this afternoon, I said that we would be supporting the motion that is before the House of Commons right now.

However, he is correct in saying that the NDP members have been consistent in their opposition to this counter-insurgency mission in Kandahar province. We have been consistent on that. We have been opposed to a counter-insurgency combat mission from the very beginning. We continue to be opposed to that kind of a military mission in southern Afghanistan because of many of the comments I cited in my speech. It is not winning the hearts and minds of the people of southern Afghanistan. In fact, we believe it is fuelling the insurgency, by the aerial bombings, by the deaths of innocent civilians, by the forced eradication of poppy cultivation. These are the very things that are fuelling the counter-insurgency mission.

We believe there is a better way to work in Afghanistan, to bring help to the people of Afghanistan. We have articulated that consistently for the last many years in this House. That continues to be our position.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP is interested in the aid part of the mission to Afghanistan. Canada has put a substantial amount of money into that. I wonder if the member could reply as to the effectiveness of information that she has been able to receive on what that aid has been used for, how effectively it has been used, an analysis of the aid, if it has been put to good use and if it has been used accountably.

● (1200)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Yukon is right. The New Democrats have raised in the House, at the defence committee and at the foreign affairs committee over and over again the issue of aid to the people of Afghanistan and the imbalance of our commitment militarily where it is 10 to 1 in terms of the aid to Afghanistan. We find that to be out of whack and we need to look at ways of getting that aid effectively to the people of Afghanistan.

Right now, in Kandahar province, the increase in the insurgency, in the IEDs and in the deaths is preventing any aid from getting through at this point. All of the aid agencies have left that province.

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They are not able to operate because of the increased insecurity in opposition to what many government members would have us believe, which is that Canada is improving security for the people in Kandahar province. Actually, the opposite is taking place. The insurgency has grown. There are more IEDs and more suicide bomb attacks are going on in that province now than there were even a year or two years ago.

I know Sarah Chayes, who was a national public radio reporter in Afghanistan, was there right after the fall of the Taliban and has continued to stay there with a small development group that is producing soap in Kandahar province. She said that when she was first there she could drive on the road from Kandahar to Kabul, even though it was a dirt road, bumpy and a terrible road. She now says that she can no longer drive from Kandahar to Kabul on a paved road because security has deteriorated so badly that she is not safe.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise, as my colleague from B.C. has risen, to support the motion before the House. I understand an amendment is pending as well.

I agree with my colleague that the motion before us is a procedural motion that essentially says that the House should take on and do what it has agreed to do through the motion that was passed. It is important for Canadians to know that we are essentially debating whether or not we should do what the House said it would do. There is no controversy there from us.

In the amendment we put forward to extend the war in Afghanistan, we kept this part of the motion. We have been calling for more oversight.

When we look at the trajectory of this war and the previous and present governments' handling of it, reporting to Parliament, the involvement of Parliament and to actually have Parliament engaged in the debate from the point of view of information sharing has been problematic.

My colleague from B.C. noted that the access to information has been more than problematic. I look at the file on detainees. We have a bizarre situation where the American process and procedure is much more transparent than the Canadian process. The Americans put up on their website who has been detained and why. They do not try to play the card that somehow they will be giving the enemy, the Taliban, information that they will use against them. Clearly not because, as I said, the Americans put it on public portals and on the web.

We have had problems with information sharing. Therefore, we need an understanding from the government about what the problems are with the mission, because it is too focused on restricting information, not sharing it. I would argue that in a responsible Parliament, particularly on issues of war, when we share information, we share responsibility. Canadians know and understand that. However, when a government restricts information and does not share knowledge, it is hard for anyone to take the overtures of the government seriously when it says that it is being transparent and accountable.

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I have mentioned the detainee issue, but let us look at the issue of aid. Time and again the government's mantra has been that it is building schools, bridges and roads and yet when asked to provide exact details, it has had problems.

Some of the problems have to do with the way aid has been distributed. We heard from a witness at the foreign affairs committee that a lot of the aid was tied up in administration. We see a tendency toward bilateral aid, where money is handed over to institutions like the World Bank and then it kind of disappears. There are no tags on the money, seemingly, and therefore there is no understanding and no accountability as to Canadians' investments, notwithstanding that there is a disproportionate amount of money being allocated for aid. Even the little bit that we are tagging for aid is lost. There is not sufficient oversight so obviously a committee is important.

Some of the other facets that need more oversight and inclusion with the committee have to do with the reasons we are in the war in Afghanistan, because many Canadians, quite rightly, are confused as to the fundamental question of why we are there.

I would cite a recent paper that was delivered by John Foster called "Afghanistan and the New Great Energy Game". It was a paper that was presented on January 29, 2008, to the group of 78. In his paper, he examines the whole issue of energy and the proposed pipeline to go through Afghanistan, which has not been debated.

• (1205)

The pipeline has been debated at NATO and in Europe and Asia, although more in Asia than in Europe, but what is the role of energy in the whole debate around Afghanistan? We know there have been discussions at NATO about the energy security. We know that in August of 2001 the American administration, which would be of interest to my friends in the Conservative Party, was actually in talks with the Taliban government. The Americans were trying to get the Taliban government to form a government of national unity, believe it or not, to ensure stability so a pipeline could be built from Turkmenistan, which has the fourth largest natural gas resource, through Afghanistan and out, to provide energy security for other parts of the world.

It is not something that has been debated, nor has it been brought forward to committee. However, if we are to have an honest debate in this country about why we are in Afghanistan, the whole issue of Afghanistan, which is what John Foster calls an energy bridge, needs to be laid out.

Is this something that the government is committing us to, the combat mission in the south, because of commitments on energy security?

The other facet that is important for the committee and Parliament to be seized with, which is not only the issue of energy supply and what was happening before 9/11 regarding negotiations with the then Taliban government and the United States on this energy bridge, but it is how the whole issue of peace and reconciliation fits into the government's plan.

I do not need tell members that every expert who came before the foreign affairs committee, the defence committee and who has spoken in public agreed that this war cannot be won militarily. It is not a controversy. It is something everyone agrees on. Therefore,

logic would then lead us to ask: If this is not a mission and a war that can be won militarily, what should happen?

We put forward a proposal stating that we should be engaged in a peace and reconciliation process. This is not something we dreamed up. This was after hearing from people in the field. Oxfam, for instance, will be in front of the foreign affairs committee explaining what they think needs to be done.

However, let us hear what a retired Canadian diplomat had to say at committee. He said:

From this moment, from right now, we need to begin the pre-negotiations and support them with inter-ethnic and inter-group dialogue at the local and national level. Capacity, mediation, negotiation, and conflict resolution have to be developed at all levels. Afghan civil society, in particular Afghan women's groups, will have an integral role to play in this whole process at the national level, but at the village level as well.

Saddique Wera, who is someone who actually advises the Afghan government, said the following at committee:

...Afghanistan cannot be won without a peace track, a political track. Why? Because there is a big political component in the conflict in Afghanistan, and a political component cannot be resolved through war alone.

If we are actually going to deal with the issues that everyone knows are critical to the war in Afghanistan, we need to look beyond this focus of the counter-insurgency. We see the Americans providing 1,000 troops. Their focus is clear. It is counter-insurgency. We will have more civilian deaths, more recruitment of the Taliban and this vicious cycle will carry on.

I am not sure at this point if the official opposition has buyer's remorse for joining the government in its motion, but let me be clear that we support the idea of having more accountability so Canadians can actually understand the problems with this mission and so we can propose what to do better in the future.

• (1210)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a little strange to me that we are debating for a number of hours today this motion, when there seems to be all party agreement that this is something that should happen. We are talking about a procedural motion in effect that could have easily been worked out and done much more expeditiously than spending a full day of the House's valuable time to discuss a procedural kind of motion.

That being said, we are now into this discussion and a number of comments have been made today that are very important to follow up on. There seems to be an ongoing confusion on part of members of the government who do not seem to appreciate that there is a difference between a mission in Afghanistan that is led by NATO and how that might differ if the United Nations were actually leading that mission.

Conservatives do not seem to appreciate that the United Nations' mandate has been given to NATO to lead this mission, but that it is the United Nations with its considerable resources, its civilian resources, and its different attitude than a military organization like NATO might bring to the leadership of the situation in Afghanistan.

I wonder if the member for Ottawa Centre might comment specifically on what difference it would make to have a United Nations-led mission in Afghanistan as opposed to the mission led by the military organization NATO.

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Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I am going to give a concrete example to underline the importance of having the UN involved and maybe demonstrate to the House and hopefully to Canadians that we do have other choices than the ones in front of us and the one that the government has taken.

Consider that the UN right now has, and it was instituted in 2005, the UN Peacebuilding Commission, headed by a Canadian, hired on merit, not because the Canadian government was able to provide the resources so that she could be hired. She was hired on merit. The interesting thing, and my colleague from Burnaby is absolutely correct, is that we need the UN to provide leadership here and one of the institutions would be the Peacebuilding Commission.

Consider this, Canada does not have a seat on the Peacebuilding Commission at the UN. We do not have a seat. Many would note this around the world the one country that people look to when we say “peacekeeping and peacebuilding” as having been responsible for that, the Pearsonian tradition, yet we do not have a seat on the Peacebuilding Commission. Why? The criteria for being on the Peacebuilding Commission is the following: a country needs to have sufficient peacekeepers in the field. We do not. The Security Council has a rotation. Finally, a country has to make sufficient contributions to the UN and we do not. Alas, we are not on the Peacebuilding Commission.

• (1215)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Burnaby—Douglas mentioned that the UN had substantial resources. If it did, I wish it would put them into Darfur.

I have two questions for the member. First, does he not find it strange that one of the greatest assets the government says of this mission is to enhance the equality of women and yet in Canada it thwarts that by removing the ability to fight for that by women's groups?

Second, the member mentioned pipelines which are important around the world. We both have an interest in Burma where there is a huge pipeline planned that will be funded by the Chinese going through Burma that would then provide revenues for that horrendous dictatorship in Burma.

I wonder if the member could comment on that because this afternoon the foreign affairs committee is going to be dealing with Burma and I hope members of the public and Parliament attend that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, in answer to the member's question on women, yes, it is pretty stark to have our government on the one hand advocating for more rights for women abroad and yet at home undermining their rights seemingly through lack of support.

On the question of Burma and the pipeline and the points I made, we have not debated the whole issue of the pipeline that is proposed through Afghanistan in this debate. No one has been talking about it. We have been bringing it forward from our side, but no one else has vis-à-vis how it relates to Burma.

Yes, we need to examine Canadian companies which are investing there and I think of Total Oil which has Canadian membership on its board. We need to hold it to account when it is making money and profits off of what I would consider misery and human rights abuses. It has to be held to account on that.

I know there are members of multinational corporations from Canada sitting on the board of Total Oil and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I participate in this debate, and before I go into it, I would like to read for the record the motion brought forward by the member for Toronto Centre, so that all of us here clearly understand what we are debating.

The motion reads:

That a special committee, consisting of 12 members, be appointed to consider the Canadian mission in Afghanistan as referred to in the motion adopted by the House on March 13, 2008 (Government Business No. 5); that the committee have all of the powers of a Standing Committee as provided in the Standing Orders; and that the members to serve on the said committee be appointed by the Whip of each party depositing with the Clerk of the House a list of his or her party's members of the committee, providing that each party shall have the same number of members on the committee as it now has on the standing committees and provided that the said lists shall be deposited with the Clerk no later than April 10, 2008.

I emphasize the date. That is the suggestion and the motion brought forward by the member for Toronto Centre.

I have referred to the member for Toronto Centre and this is my first opportunity to congratulate him on his election and return to the House of Commons where he served many years ago. He brings with him a wealth of not only experience but more so of knowledge.

He thought about this, observing for many months and even years what was happening in this honourable chamber. In our discussions outside this chamber before he was elected, and even now that he has returned, I sense the frustration that he was experiencing, that we are experiencing and all Canadians are experiencing, something that the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam referred to earlier, that it is very difficult to get information from the government.

The member did not want to simply come here and say, “Here I am and here is an idea”. No, this is all predicated by the frustration that we are all experiencing.

I have stated before and I will say it again, I had the honour of serving as chairman of the Standing Committee on National Defence. Today I am privileged to vice-chair the committee as well and I too experience firsthand what exactly is going on.

When the NDP member talks about waiting 300 days to get a response. That is unacceptable. That is why I stressed the April 10, 2008 deadline.

I would like to also correct the record, if I may. As I followed this debate, the member for Calgary East, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, rebutted in a way that I guess the parliamentary language was acceptable. He referred to the Liberals not being in the chamber when all these debates were unfolding. It is improper to say that someone lied, so I will say that he misled the House. He put forward a false statement.

I know that I spoke on government business No. 5. I know the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore spoke on it and other members as well. When he made that statement, it was showing to me and to Canadians that as much as we are in a bipartisan way supporting our troops, yet again he is politicizing it.

Business of Supply

Am I supposed to say that he is not even in the House right now? I would not say that. If he had an interest, he would be here. Nevertheless, I will go beyond that.

The member for Saint-Jean, who also sits on the committee, expressed his frustration earlier today. I will give an example. In the previous cabinet the former minister of national defence did come to the committee once and gave us a report.

It has been quite some time since the new Minister of National Defence assumed his responsibilities. It is like pulling teeth to try and get the minister to come before the committee and give us a report.

We do get reports from the military people. They brief us in terms of an update of what is happening in a generic way. For example, I made a comment in committee the other day that I see on television in the reports from Afghanistan scenes that are a year and a half or two years old.

• (1220)

We are today in committee addressing the post traumatic stress syndrome issue in terms of the health and well-being of our men and women when they return.

Let me go back to the parliamentary secretary. He said this is not necessary and there is a parliamentary committee looking into the study on Afghanistan. That really irked me and I will say why.

The defence committee worked very hard for many months when I chaired the committee and put 13 recommendations together. This was before the Manley report was even thought about.

The parliamentary secretary, on behalf of his minister and the government, has the audacity to say that there is a parliamentary committee. There really is no parliamentary committee because we know very well a booklet is put out by the government which talks about transparency, openness and open access, and yet, in a premeditated and deliberate way, before the members come to committee, the government has a plan. It asks how it is going to address the committee and it becomes very frustrating.

No wonder the committee cannot get the minister to come before the committee. One would have thought that a couple of months after the appointment to his new role, he would come before committee.

What is also very frustrating is that the committee has been trying for well over a year and a half to visit Afghanistan, so members can get a firsthand view of what is going on. The chairman of the committee went to the liaison committee and lobbied to get the support and funding to visit Afghanistan and the budget was approved.

The next thing we know, there is this obstacle and that obstacle is either a timing problem, a security problem, et cetera, but every time we turn on the tube when Parliament is not in session, lo and behold, there is a visit to Afghanistan by the Minister of National Defence. I am glad he is over there because we can never make enough visits to show our men and women there, who are putting their lives on the line, that we stand with them.

I do not criticize that, on the contrary, but it is really funny how anybody from the government can show up any time and the committee has all sorts of obstacles put before it and can never visit Afghanistan. Maybe some day it will get an answer. I am very frustrated with that.

It is frustrating when we ask for information, as the member from the NDP has asked. As was pointed out, 300 days really stuck in my mind, not for us but for Canadians.

One would say today that the member for Toronto Centre is trying to showcase. That is furthest from the truth. I have known this gentleman for many years. I have heard him speak on a one to one basis in Toronto, outside Toronto, and on television. His commentary to this very day has been nothing but, first and foremost, support for our men and women in uniform, support for our military, and ensuring that we in Canada are on the right track.

I believe we are on the right track, but there are elements within this mission that make me very uncomfortable. I have discussed them before and I will touch upon them again.

There are over 37 or 38 nations participating in this most disastrous mission. I say disastrous only because 82 Canadians have lost their lives and we pay full respect to the families and appreciate what sacrifices have been made. Other military men and women have lost their lives from other nations as well.

I say other nations. Some time ago we met with the defence committee from Germany and pointed out to it that Canada has never taken a step back to anybody. Canada, in its rich history, traditionally has stepped forward, has brought tremendous results, stood proud no matter what front it has faced, what mission it has been on, whether peacekeeping or at the front, no matter where.

• (1225)

We have not hesitated to do our share here. What is unacceptable to Canadians, as I am hearing, is why Canada is taking this hit. The government is trying to soften this by saying that we have the French, for example. One day France is saying that it is going to commit so many soldiers and the next day it is thinking about it. The next thing we know, we will be here next year—hopefully—a year from now will see that most likely these soldiers will never show up.

The Manley report said that we need an additional 1,000 soldiers. What Mr. Manley really said was that it would help, but that is not really the answer and the solution to the Afghanistan mission, even though we knew that the Americans had already committed about 2,500 soldiers anyway, prior to the Manley report.

One thousand soldiers will not help us address this issue, because we have heard all the United States military commanders, when they come before a media briefing, talk about the number being in the thousands. I think one statement was that 100,000 soldiers are needed to address this issue.

What are an additional 1,000 soldiers going to do for this? Absolutely nothing.

Business of Supply

There is also something else that I have found unacceptable. I heard the other day that one of the representatives from the government of Afghanistan said Afghans are so happy because the Japanese are going to be building a new airport.

I do not know why the parliamentary secretary is winding his hands, but I am glad he has come back to the chamber to respond to the challenge I put to him. Now that he is here, I will remind him that the Liberal members were in this hon. chamber and were debating this issue. Maybe he was not here at that time to see us when we were on our feet, and I will accept that if that is going to be his response.

I remember that when these conflicts were breaking out in Afghanistan and Iraq there was a notion that all the nations that were going to participate were also going to be involved in the reconstruction. Canadians are spending billions of dollars to help build schools, roads, water wells and infrastructure and to help with training and so on.

We are doing our share, but I find it unacceptable that other nations that are not even there putting their people's lives on the line are getting these contracts to build this infrastructure. Why do we not put in a caveat as they have put a caveat on us? Why are we not putting in a caveat and saying that as for the moneys we are putting into building this infrastructure we will make sure that they go to Canadian companies?

We are seeing a sudden downturn in the Canadian economy, which is not to my liking, and I am sure not to the liking of most Canadians, especially when I read the news in my neck of the woods in Scarborough. I am really upset to learn that 72 nurses are going to be laid off from the Scarborough hospital system and over 200 employees are going to be disappearing.

I know it does not relate directly, but how it relates, if I may tie it together for members, is that if these Canadian companies are successful in getting these construction jobs, for example, or redevelopment opportunities in that country, they would then be hiring their employees in Toronto, Scarborough or elsewhere, thus generating revenue for Canada and for the provinces so that 72 nursing jobs will not be lost.

We Canadians are a very fair people. We have reached out and we have shed blood all over the globe. As I have said, we have not taken a back seat to anyone, but at the same time I do believe there is an obligation to make sure that our backyard is well looked after as well.

That is how the member for Toronto Centre always referred to this mission. We have to do it in a balanced way. We have to do it the right way.

In closing, as my time is just about up, there is one thing I would like to see from the government and that is for it to keep to its word: transparency and openness, which is really what the Manley report said, and the government committed to that. We want openness. We do not want these cue cards, as we read about in the paper, that are prepared for the Conservative members to read before they even talk to anyone or to the media. For God's sake, the member for Calgary East and all of us as members were elected democratically by our constituents.

● (1230)

I recall that in 1993 the Reform Party members came here with the notion that we are here to speak on behalf of our people. I would like to remind members that people send us here to be their voice. Yes, there are times when members take positions favouring their own party, but in the past on both sides of the House I have seen members stand up independently to vote against or with the government. All of us have done that. I say that proudly.

I see the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, who will tell us at first hand that when we sit in committee there are no stripes, and we try to do the best we can for our men and women in our military. There is the odd time when we might have a difference of opinion, but at the end of the day we find a way to move forward positively.

All I am asking for, and what this motion is asking for, first, is that date so we can deliver. Second, I am asking the government to keep to the recommendations of the Manley report. Third, I am asking the government to maybe take a look at the 13 recommendations put together by the defence committee and tie them together. I will tell the parliamentary secretary again that yes, there is a committee, he is right, and that committee did bring forward recommendations for his information.

At the end of the day, what are we here to do? We are here first and foremost to make sure that our men and women in Afghanistan are properly equipped, properly prepared and doing the right thing so Canada once again can maintain its proud history and tradition in terms of its initiatives.

I would suggest to the government that it do what other countries do. I will use the United States of America as an example. It consistently is at the podium. Today there is a hearing in the United States. General Petraeus is doing a full presentation before a committee. General Hillier has appeared only once before committee. It is not that the man will not come. He would be glad to come any time and visit with us. I give full marks to General Hillier, but I am asking the parliamentary secretary to do whatever he can to get the Minister of National Defence before our committee so we can be briefed.

In closing, I am also suggesting that a representative, whether it be the parliamentary secretary or the minister, give everybody an update on an ongoing basis on what is happening, in the press room or wherever. The government should give an update not just to us in the House but to all Canadians because it is they who are footing the bill. I am concerned. I end with the dollars only because we budgeted so much.

I was pleased yesterday to hear the Minister of National Defence talk about new equipment, but he did say one thing that really upset me. He said that finally after 13 years of doing nothing we are now purchasing new equipment. He knows that was not an accurate statement, as does every member in this House. I asked the question in committee. When the Conservatives were talking about the \$14 billion in their 2007 budget, I asked if it was new money or the money that the Liberals put in our 2005 budget. After two questions, I must say that the response was that it was the \$14 billion allocated in the Liberal budget of 2005.

Business of Supply

However, I must compliment the Conservative government. At that time, the Conservatives added a few more needed dollars. So when the minister yesterday talked about how finally after 13 years of nothing being done we are now purchasing new equipment, and I believe he said helicopters, we fully support that.

In order to show our unified support to our men and women, none of us here should be playing politics with this issue. Nobody has anything to gain from that, from our side anyway. There can only be losses. I encourage the government and the members on our side to keep the tone at that level.

•(1235)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before moving on to questions and comments, I want to remind the hon. member for Scarborough Centre that it is unparliamentary to point out the absence of members. I think there were a couple of times in his speech when he might have been skating close to that.

Mr. John Cannis: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Thank you. We will move on to questions and comments. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad you mentioned that. I am pleased, in fact, to have the member mention my presence. I think people who read *Hansard* will see who was here and who was not here for the 30 hours of debate. I will just leave that to the folks who want to read *Hansard*.

The member is right. We try not to misrepresent things. When we are in committee, we try to work together, and by and large we do a pretty good job. I am disappointed that he has not carried that over into the House, because in fact he misrepresented many things. I will point out a number of them.

The Manley report said that we needed a minimum of 1,000 soldiers in the south of Afghanistan, specifically in Kandahar, to allow the Canadian Forces to focus more effort on training, reconstruction and development. That is what Manley asked for. That is what is in fact happening.

He talked about ministerial visits to committees. Our ministers have visited committees dozens of times. There is no occasion when this current minister has been asked to come that he has not come. It is simply misleading to suggest that he is somehow holding out. There have been I think 17 technical briefings on the mission in Afghanistan, all but one by this government.

The member talked about parliamentary travel. The defence committee travelled to Afghanistan in January 2007. We have had travel approved. There is no issue of delay in travel at all. It is happening according to the process that normally takes place in this House. To represent otherwise is simply misleading.

He talked about debate. We are the only government that has debated the mission in Afghanistan in this House—twice. It is very misleading to suggest that we have not had fulsome debate in this House. I was disappointed to see the member misrepresent that.

He talked about contracts, saying that we should have contracts to Canadian companies. Canadian companies can bid on any contracts they want. Nothing is stopping them.

We do not go into a mission like Afghanistan to benefit Canadian companies or to benefit anybody financially. We go into a mission like Afghanistan to do the right thing.

Responsibility to protect cannot be just words. It has to be actions. We are taking those actions. We are doing it for the right reason. We would all work better if we did not misrepresent, on either side, what is going on. I would ask the member to stop that.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, he said dozens of times, that we had the minister before committee dozens of times. I say this publicly now: I will resign if he is correct, and let him resign if he is not correct on that statement that we have had the minister before committee dozens of times. That is the public challenge. I was not going to do this because I have great respect for the member, but he resigns if I am correct, and I resign if he is correct.

Now, on the contracts, I was forced to talk about the committee simply because the parliamentary secretary instigated that when he said there is a committee looking into it. We did look into it. If the Prime Minister indeed committed to and executed what he said during the election, he would have respected the committee's work. He would have looked at the committee's report and he would have not had a need to go to an independent committee, the Manley committee.

The Prime Minister and that party have no respect for democracy and no respect for committee. I had no intention of raising my voice to this pitch, but unfortunately the parliamentary secretary chose to take me in this direction. I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

•(1240)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are two things I took note of when my colleague from Scarborough was speaking. The first was that he pointed out a fact put forward by my colleague, the defence critic for the NDP, which is that in this country at this time there is a freedom of information chill associated with the Afghan war.

There is a saying that freedom of information is the oxygen democracy breathes. If that is the case, we are having a smog day in Ottawa in everything associated with the Afghan mission, and my colleague was right to point this out. If for no other reason, it is justified to create this committee. Perhaps that committee will be able to pry free the information that is otherwise being denied to people through the ordinary system. My colleague received just today a letter stating that it will be another 300 days to answer a fairly straightforward access to information request submitted months ago. That is one thing I would ask my colleague to comment on.

Business of Supply

Second, he stood and started talking about the contracts associated with the Afghan war and a chill ran up and down my spine, because there is always a business case for war. If we look at the *Hansard* debates during the second world war and the Korean war, we will see that a great deal of time was spent worrying about who was getting these lucrative, juicy contracts associated with profiteering from the war. I was disappointed to hear my colleague start talking about “me too, we want some of those juicy contracts associated with killing—

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

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I am of the race of Solon. Solon was the founder of democracy in ancient Greece. I believe in openness and transparency, and I like to believe the House functions in a democratic way. However, when it takes 300 days to get a response, then maybe democracy is being eroded.

On the contracts, I simply said it from the point of view of the so-called caveats within the system, or within our participation, that these other nations involved in the mission cannot go and participate because of this and because of that.

We had the opportunity in 2008 to address these caveats. In Bucharest, for example, the Prime Minister simply had to say, “We voted in Parliament. We will commit upon condition that these caveats are lifted”. He abdicated his responsibilities.

Regarding the contracts, just like George Bush said, those who participate will benefit. We need to ensure that only Canadian companies will participate in these contracts, so the Canadians and nurses do not get laid off.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member coming from the cradle of democracy. He talked about a lack of transparency, and I will give him a chance to elaborate more.

I know one thing Canadians are very proud of is democracy. How can they be proud of a government that is stymying committees every time they want to look into something the government could be doing wrong? They are breaking the House rules. In justice, for instance, the chair has walked out four times, breaking the House rules. Could he comment further on that?

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is a very important debate and it would do our House well if members asked questions about the debate at hand. I would question the relevance of the intervention of the person who spoke before me.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned a document written by the Conservatives to thwart committee. I was responding to his comments on lack of transparency of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Maybe the hon. member for Scarborough Centre could briefly respond to the question in a relevant way to the motion at hand.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I will tie it together. I only touched upon it because we have seen, not just in our committee but in other committees, how the procedures within committee are disrupted and at the end of the day we are unable to ask the questions of witnesses properly. We are unable to get information.

The reason I brought it up was I kept touching upon the report that we put together as a committee. To get to the end of that report, there

were always roadblocks and roadblocks to the point that we became very frustrated at the end of the day. I was referring to that.

• (1245)

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would the member care to comment on the fact that the government tried and tried, unsuccessfully, to get the Liberals and the other opposition parties to have committee hearings leading up to the actual vote in the House? It was deeply regrettable, in my judgment and certainly in the judgment of the Prime Minister, that the Liberals, in particular, were unwilling to take information before we actually got to a vote.

Would he care to comment on that?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, there was no specific strategy behind that. If we go back and look at what happened at that time—

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Why am I not surprised?

Mr. John Cannis: There is no strategy, and I said it earlier, when it comes to addressing this most sensitive issue in a bipartisan way. If Conservatives believe in what they say regarding support for our military, the other day I read an article about veterans who were involved in nuclear testing. They were promised by the former minister during the election that they would be compensated, that it was all done. A year or two later, that compensation was not there. I do not want to go in that direction because it is really not the issue. However, they were promised burial expenses. Supposedly a letter was sent and everything was done, but nothing was done until the family came here.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to address the House. I am sharing my time with the hon. member for Crowfoot.

Afghanistan tops the government's foreign policy agenda, that is clear. Canada's whole mission is part of a UN sanctioned, NATO-led coalition that is helping Afghans rebuild security, governance and prosperity.

This is a complex, multi-faceted mission. It is certainly the most dangerous operation Canada has undertaken in a generation and arguably the most difficult. However, Canada has risen to the challenge and we are playing a leadership role.

In addition to diplomats, police, corrections officers and aid workers, among others, Canada currently has some 2,500 Canadian Forces personnel deployed in support of the mission. We have assumed responsibility for the security in Kandahar province, but know that success can only be achieved with progress in areas such as governance, development and reconstruction.

Business of Supply

With a mission this challenging, the work of parliamentary committees is particularly valuable. Committees can provide thoughtful and constructive recommendations to the government. They also play an important role in informing Canadians about the Afghan mission.

The government appreciates the work of parliamentary committees that have examined Canada's mission in Afghanistan. In particular, the Standing Committee on National Defence, on which I sit, the Senate Standing Committee on Security and Defence and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

The value that the government places on the work of the committees is evident in the support that we give them. We have had government ministers and senior officials appear before committees to answer questions. We have organized committee business to Afghanistan so members can see first-hand the outstanding work that Canadians are doing there.

I would like to pay tribute to the fine work that parliamentary committees have done in relation to Afghanistan.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

The Standing Committee on National Defence has studied the Canadian mission in Afghanistan closely. The most recent committee report was tabled in June 2007.

In the period before the report was released, a number of government ministers appeared before the committee to discuss the challenges in Afghanistan. The ministers who appeared before the committee include: the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Public Safety, and the Minister of International Cooperation. The committee also heard from a number of other Canadian officials including the Deputy Minister of National Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff.

Two Canadians who hold important positions within international organizations also appeared before the committee: General Henault, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, and Christopher Alexander, the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Afghanistan.

To support the work of the committee, National Defence also provides regular briefings on Afghanistan. Since March 2007, the committee has received no less than six official operational briefings from DND. Eight members of the committee visited Afghanistan in early 2007 and met with members of the Canadian mission who have been working non stop to bring stability and hope to the Afghan people.

The committee has spoken with representatives of the Canadian Forces, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the RCMP. They have been briefed about the Canada's whole of government approach, which ties together development, reconstruction, governance and safety initiatives to help Afghans build a better future.

Without a doubt, the committee's work has contributed to the informed debates that have recently taken place in this House.

[*English*]

The Standing Committee on National Security and Defence has also done wide-ranging and thoughtful work in relation to Afghanistan. The Senate committee's most recent report on Afghanistan was published in February 2007. The committee has subsequently heard testimony on Afghanistan from a number of governmental and non-governmental organizations, including National Defence, the RAND Corporation and others.

A week ago, six members of the Senate company visited Afghanistan as part of their ongoing examination of Canada's role in this mission by the international community. While in Kandahar, committee members were able to see the development initiatives. They also visited the provincial reconstruction team, went to a Canadian forward operating base and toured the provincial operations centre.

The committee members also had the opportunity to meet with Canadian officials working in Afghanistan, including representatives from Foreign Affairs, National Defence, the Canadian International Development Agency and Correctional Service Canada. Committee members also spoke with local Afghans and members of the international community.

The Senate committee's efforts to explain the challenges that Canada faces in Afghanistan have no doubt contributed to public understanding of this complex mission.

I should note that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development is also working on a study of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. As with the other committees examining Afghanistan, the government will be supporting their efforts.

[*Translation*]

The hon. members of this House know that all the parliamentary committees studying the mission in Afghanistan are doing important work. They have issued a number of sensible and constructive recommendations.

Canadians are also benefiting from the work of the parliamentary committees. Their meetings and reports help explain the complex security challenges at play in Afghanistan and often underscore the dedication of the official Canadian representatives on the ground.

[*English*]

Less than a month ago, the House voted to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan until 2011. Included in that motion is a passage which reads:

that the House of Commons should strike a special parliamentary committee on Afghanistan which would meet regularly with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and National Defence and senior officials, and that the House should authorize travel by the special committee to Afghanistan and the surrounding region so that the special committee can make frequent recommendations on the conduct and progress of our efforts in Afghanistan;

Parliamentary committees are important, and that is why it is vital that we get it right when we establish a new committee. We must be mindful that committees need to work effectively and serve the interests of Canadians.

Business of Supply

For the new committee to fully serve Parliament and the Canadian people, it must operate in a non-partisan manner. There is a natural tendency for members of all parties to emphasize aspects of our mission in Afghanistan that serve their partisan purposes. This can give an inaccurate and misleading picture of what has really happened and results in a misinformed Canadian public.

Special interest groups have capitalized on the situation in an attempt to shape public opinion. The media also has an important role to play in this area. I do not expect that either interest groups or the media will change their approaches just because we have struck a special committee. That will make it more important than ever for committee members, to the extent possible, to keep open minds to all the information that they will receive.

As the Manley panel has pointed out, there are many challenges to our mission and many things that need to be done better. As the panel also points out, there has been progress in many areas and that the cause is noble and worth pursuing. The new committee needs to be able to hear and accept good news and bad news with equal scrutiny and not simply discard one or the other because it does not fit a certain party's position.

Afghanistan is the most complex mission that Canada has undertaken in a generation. The operation is following a whole of government approach, combining Canadian diplomats, police, aid workers and military personnel, among others. The mission has been examined by both the House and Senate committees with responsibility for defence issues.

These committees have made important contributions. Their recommendations have been thoughtful, while their meetings and reports have helped inform Canadians. The government recognizes the value of these committees and has supported their work.

The motion that extended Canada's mission in Afghanistan included a reference to the establishment of a new parliamentary committee on Afghanistan. We must ensure that any new committee is meaningful and doing work that benefits Canadians. With the motion and amendments as presented, I am confident the committee will get the job done.

• (1255)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the objectives in Afghanistan is training the police and army so they can take over. Could the member update us on how we are doing on that front?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. The focus of the mission of the Canadian Forces is to train the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to the point where they can look after their own affairs. We are responsible for parts of that in the province of Kandahar. Other countries like Germany and the U.S. are responsible for other aspects.

The Afghan National Army is progressing very well. We have six kandaks that have been organized and are operating various levels of efficiency. A kandak, by Canadian terms, is a small sized battalion. There are three infantry battalions, two support battalions and a headquarters battalion. They are operating side by side with Canadians. They are more and more leading the missions that

Canadians are helping them to plan, but the Afghans are doing a lot more of the planning and execution with our support.

The Afghan National Police is a little slower to come along. There are more challenges in that area, but we are making progress. The army is well on its way to achieving its goal of about 80,000, I believe the number is. There is no specific date to that. We are working toward that as quickly as we can. The Afghan National Police, as I said, is more of a challenge, but that is where the Correctional Service Canada people, the RCMP trainers and military police trainers come in.

We are expending a lot of effort in that area. With the additional 1,000 troops that will be coming, we are going to be able to put more emphasis in that area to accomplish the aims of the Manley panel and, in fact, the Government of Canada.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we now know the additional 1,000 troops that will go in to Kandahar to assist the Canadians will be American troops. We know the Americans have 13,000 troops still involved in Operation Enduring Freedom, which is operated separately from the ISAF mission that Canada is a part of.

Could the parliamentary secretary explain to us if there will be a clear separation of the American troops involved with Canadian troops in Kandahar from Operation Enduring Freedom and how that will be accomplished?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, that question is a good one and a logical one. Operation Enduring Freedom and the ISAF mission are two separate missions. Obviously they have the same general aim in the country of Afghanistan. The command and control structure is separate. The forces under ISAF and specifically the Canadian Forces and allied forces in Kandahar are under NATO command. It is not a matter of U.S. command or Canadian command, it is a matter of NATO command.

At this point in RC south where those soldiers will be operating alongside Canadians, the commander happens to be a Canadian. In the next rotation it could easily be an American, Dutch, British or perhaps someone else. The command and control is separate for the two missions. The control of the forces that will be operating side by side the Canadians as requested by the Manley panel and accomplished in NATO recently will be under NATO command.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to have an opportunity to give a speech, but I would like to commend my colleague from Edmonton Centre on the remarkable work he is doing in his job as a parliamentary secretary.

The parliamentary secretary has had a long career in the armed forces. He has been to Afghanistan, not only as committee travel, but he also spent Christmas with the troops in Afghanistan. The member has been to Afghanistan a number of different times. Perhaps he could tell us about some very clear indicators that he has seen while he has been in Afghanistan of the change, of the transition, of the way that people are viewing this mission from the Afghans' perspective.

Business of Supply

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I know I do not have much time so I will tell one short anecdote. I was there at Christmas 2006. On Christmas Eve, looking out from a place called Masum Ghar across the countryside, I was smoking a cigar and having a coffee with the chief of the defence staff. It was a dark night. Bombs were going off in the distance. It was not a very pretty picture.

I was at exactly the same spot this past Christmas with the Minister of National Defence, having a cigar and a cup of coffee, looking out over exactly the same landscape. It looked like a scene from the Canadian Prairies with villages in the distance with the lights on. The villagers were there and the lights were on. They were there the year before, but the lights just were not on. The lights are on and people are home because Canadians are there. The Afghans know that. I think more Canadians should understand that too.

• (1300)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think we are going to have to do something about the parliamentary secretary's smoking habits. I do know he has done long hours of hard work on this file.

It is indeed a pleasure to stand in the House of Commons and represent the riding of Crowfoot, but also to be able to speak about Canada's mission in Afghanistan. This is an issue that is sure to define our country's role in international affairs for years to come.

I have the privilege of serving as the chair of the foreign affairs and international development committee. Certainly there is a number of different areas where Canada is involved and has been over the years. The work that the Canadian armed forces, the Canadian government and the people of Canada have done in Afghanistan is going to be a defining moment and a real standard which other countries are going to have to take a look at and perhaps live up to.

This government welcomes the kind of debate that we are seeing here in the House of Commons today, the dialogue that is going on between all parties, because frank and open exchanges and discussion are key in shaping our future role in Afghanistan. It is important to bring various viewpoints to bear when we are making decisions as critical as what our country is making in regard to Afghanistan.

As often as we see and hear about the military aspect of our mission in the newspapers, on the radio and on television, the humanitarian and developmental assistance aspects of this mission are also critical success factors in Afghanistan.

As the hon. Minister of International Cooperation very eloquently stated during the debate on Motion No. 5, our efforts to bring hope and confidence back to Afghanistan rests in a large part on our ability to promote development and reconstruction in the country. Progress in these areas means better living standards for ordinary Afghans.

That is what this is about. This is not necessarily about just checking off certain benchmarks when we attain something. It is about how the ordinary Afghan lives, the standard of living for Afghans.

It means improved infrastructure. It means enhanced access to vital services such as health care and education. It means increased protection under the law. It means a greater respect for human rights. It means more employment prospects, a stronger economy. These are the things that make up the difference in the day to day living for the average Afghan.

There is no denying that our mission continues to be dangerous and challenging. There is no denying that we still have a long way to go. There is also no denying that we are seeing significant progress in many areas.

I want to touch briefly on some of the areas that have been brought forward to our committee and which I think Canadians really need to understand. What progress are we seeing in Afghanistan?

First of all, there is education. Close to six million children are now in school in Afghanistan. One-third of those students are girls. This is a dramatic increase over 2001 when there were only 700,000 children who attended school and every one of them was a boy. All of them were young men from Afghanistan, no girls.

In health care, tuberculosis deaths have been cut in half annually. Infant mortality rates have dropped by almost a quarter. These are lives saved.

We all notice and count the number of casualties that we see in Afghanistan. Very seldom do we ever take account or an inventory of the number of lives that are saved. Prior to 2001 and even up until a number of years ago there were high infant mortality rates.

We also see an access to health care that has soared to over 80%. Access is up from only 9% for the ordinary average Afghan just a few years ago.

In humanitarian assistance, more than five million refugees have returned to Afghanistan since 2002. Why are these people coming home? Because they have hope. They see that this mission is making a difference. More than 365,000 in 2007 had returned, with the assistance of the Canada supported United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

• (1305)

A number of days ago we celebrated a day when we called upon the world to get rid of landmines. In mine action nearly 1.3 billion square metres of land have been cleared, opening up fields and land for productive purposes such as farming and other commerce.

In economic development, per capita income doubled between 2003 and 2006. More than 418,000 people, the majority of them women, are accessing small loans and savings services to help rebuild their lives and reduce the vulnerability of their economic stresses.

In community development we have seen over 20,000 elected councils. They have been put in place across the country to oversee community development projects in areas such as agriculture, infrastructure renewal and access to drinking water. More than 18,000 such projects have been completed to date. Their impact on the country's reconstruction cannot be overstated.

These are but a few examples of genuine progress in Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

I cannot stress enough what an important difference we are making in the lives of Afghans. This is not to say that the situation is perfect. I think every party here and most Canadians understand that we have not reached any end goal yet. We continue to face a daunting set of challenges in the face of such diverse and complex issues.

On poverty, we are still addressing it. There are extremely low literacy rates. When we start an education system from square one it takes time to build. There is a desperate lack of infrastructure. Institutions have been debilitated by war and misrule. The continued insurgency is still a huge concern not just for our military, but for all people who understand the situation and the fact that this insurgency still comes. There is widespread corruption, the illegal drug trade, a tradition of warlord rule, and the condition of women and girls. I underline that one again because we have already spoken of it. Still, part of the culture, perhaps part of the tradition of that country under the Taliban rule has been one—and diminishing is not even the right word—of ignoring completely the human rights especially for women and girls.

All these factors make Afghanistan one of the most challenging operating environments in the world. It is challenging for us as a government and challenging for us as a country. It is challenging for the Afghan government, a new government trying to develop a certain level of democracy. Certainly it is challenging even for our allies and partners. They are realizing that it is a massive undertaking as well.

Working in such an environment is a gruelling task, but we are learning something new every day. We are applying new knowledge from lessons learned as we constantly explore ways to improve our effectiveness.

I do not think this government has ever come to this place and said that this is the only way to attack poverty and the issue of security. We have never done that. We have learned from lessons. This is a progression even as we continue in many of these ways. However, we are moving forward.

That said, if some of the progress that I mentioned earlier is any indication, there are many reasons to hope for a brighter future. There are many reasons to believe that if we stay the course, if we continue to apply lessons learned, if we continue to look at innovative ways, we will see positive changes in Afghanistan.

That is why this government is pleased that the House supported our motion to extend the mission beyond 2009. It is why we are pleased that the House continues to be engaged in helping to shape the future and the way forward in the years ahead.

Canada is making an important contribution to the mission. We are proud of the accomplishments of our men and women who help Afghans rebuild their country after years of war.

The Prime Minister in the House has been very clear. Our military mission ends in 2011. As the Prime Minister said in Bucharest, “We are serious about not just staying but also leaving. When I say leaving, I mean accomplishing our objectives, which is training the Afghan forces so they can take responsibility for their own security”.

Much work remains to be done, to build a nation and a society that is self-sufficient, economically stable and able to provide its own prosperity.

• (1310)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech was an excellent outline of some of the benefits and some of the failures of the mission to date, although I must say there was a conflict between what he said and what the minister said in the number of Afghans who have health care. He talked in the range of 80% and the minister said 100%. I hope the government, in flaunting its successes to make the case for this mission, it will at least get its facts straight.

However, my question relates to refugees returning to Afghanistan.

I went to Afghanistan to support our troops and to ensure we were providing them with good equipment, et cetera. One of the benefits that I do not think he talked about in detail was that in a secure situation thousands of refugees are returning home to Afghanistan, which, of course, is a benefit for the world community. I wonder if he could just talk about those returning refugees.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, with regard to what he viewed as being some kind of conflict, not all five points of the Canada Health Act are as easy to fulfill in Afghanistan as they are here. Accessibility is tough. I would say that about 80% of Afghans have access, and I would not say easy, but have access to Health care if they need it immediately. In a country where there is no infrastructure, it takes people longer to get to the place where health services are given. However, I do not think the difference is anything major that should be of concern to this House. We want to see a strong health care system in Afghanistan.

With regard to the refugees coming back, I have had the opportunity of speaking to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and he has talked, I think even in this House, quite extensively about the importance of building an economy.

Why are these millions of people coming back to Afghanistan? Again, because they have hope. It is not simply that they want to come back to live in Kabul or to live wherever they have always lived. They want to come back to be involved in the commerce and in the economy, to lead productive lives and to raise their families in a place where there is hope and they are now seeing hope. We could talk about what is happening in microfinancing.

When I was back in my constituency last week, we were talking at a town hall meeting about how commerce has grown in Afghanistan. It used to be that the average Afghan lived on less than a dollar a day. A few months ago, the economy doubled and they were living on two dollars a day. It is now close to three dollars a day. We are seeing hope. People are becoming involved in small businesses and now have a level of income to sustain their families.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Crowfoot, for the excellent work he has done as chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. It is a privilege and an honour to have him as a neighbour and a good friend in the neighbouring constituency.

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I have had quite a few constituents come to me over the course of the mission with questions and concerns about the mission. However, when I explained to them all of the good things that the Canadian Forces, the development workers and the agencies were doing in Afghanistan, they soon came to realize that we had every reason to be in Afghanistan.

One of the other things that has recently come to light and which I have had a chance to talk to some of my constituents about is the alleged terrorist ring that was uncovered in England and the plot to take down two Air Canada flights, one to Montreal and one to Toronto.

I wonder what feedback he has had from his constituents with regard to the fact that we still have a clear and present danger of terrorism facing Canadian citizens who are going about their everyday lives, trying to get things done, to raise their families and to go to work. I wonder if he could just comment on what he is hearing in his constituency about the fact that terrorism is still present out in the world.

• (1315)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, before I answer, I want to welcome our new member to the foreign affairs committee, the member for Toronto Centre. I look forward to serving with him.

I think Afghanistan has moved beyond the war of armed terror. I think we are now looking at how we can help the ordinary Afghan, how the country of Afghanistan can be built and how the economy can be built.

Yes, terrorism is real and, yes, there are those from fundamental militant extremist groups who would do anything in their war against freedom, democracy, rule of law, justice and all those things that we value and take for granted here in this country. There are those who would do everything they could to drain the hopes of Afghans who want the same type of human rights. Now we need to look at ways of developing a country so that the dream can live.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Davenport.

This motion occurs in a context and that context was, in some measure, set by the Manley report. I know John Manley and regard him as a friend. I know the other members of the committee less well but I have nothing but the highest respect for each member on that panel and nothing but the highest respect for the work they did. Their report, in some respects, set the context for the original government motion, then the fuller reply motion set forward by the Liberal Party, and the ultimate adoption by this House of what primarily was the Liberal Party response crafted, in part, by the member for Toronto Centre.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, as the case may be, most of the focus of the debate, both here and in the media, had to do with additional soldiers, helicopters and things of that nature. Much less debate was focused on increasing Canada's contribution to reconstruction and redevelopment and much less on systematically addressing the effectiveness of Canada's contribution toward setting benchmarks for success. Many government members have taken this opportunity to say that there have been a number of successes and, in some measure, they are correct.

The final recommendation in the Manley report was that there be more frank and frequent reporting on events in Afghanistan. If this mission is to enjoy knowledgeable support by the people of Canada, and that support now going forward to 2011, and if Canadians are to be effectively informed, this recommendation needs to be taken very seriously.

Regrettably, in the initial drafting of the government's motion, the last three recommendations were only given lip service or ignored altogether. It took the Liberal Party, with some effort, to redraft the motion in an acceptable form and to bring forward this more frank and frequent reporting of events in Afghanistan by recommending a special committee.

One might ask why we need a special committee. As some government members have already said, we have the foreign affairs committee and the defence committee, and we have already had 30-odd hours of debate in the House, et cetera. They have given the illusion that the government's motion was adequate.

One of the recommendations of the Manley panel, which was subsequently adopted by the Liberal Party and the government, was that there needed to be a special committee of this House. The special committee would be simply that. It would be a special committee to continuously monitor our mission in Afghanistan. It would be set up for that purpose and that purpose only. Unlike all of the other committees that have been mentioned and that have other agenda items on their daily order papers, this committee would be a special committee on the Afghanistan mission.

It was rather regrettable that the government did not pick that up in its initial drafting of its motion. However, thank goodness, with the assistance of the Liberal Party, the House has now recommended that there be a special committee to deal with the issue of Afghanistan and Afghanistan alone and that it has regular meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of International Cooperation and other special persons as are necessary from time to time.

• (1320)

The special committee would bring a regular focus on Afghanistan and it would give members of Parliament the opportunity to ask, in a committee atmosphere, significant and important questions, questions that Canadians want answered.

We set up this special committee, not for the government, not for the opposition and not for various partisan politics, but for the benefit and information of Canadians. If the committee is able to achieve that, then we will all have much better and more informed support for the mission as it goes forward into the year 2011. However, for better or for worse, we are in Afghanistan in a military fashion until 2011. Hopefully, we will have the ministers come on a regular basis before the committee.

The other part of the motion deals with authorizing travel. It is pretty easy to be opinionated here when we are half a world away from the conflict. Certainly there are those of us who think we can run a war from this side of the world but I think it is extremely important for members travel, to see the lay of the land and to inform themselves as to what should or should not be done.

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The other part of the recommendation is that the committee make frequent recommendations with respect to the conduct and the progress of our efforts in Afghanistan. Again, if we want support for this mission, this is the way to go. We visit the place and develop a level of expertise. We need consistent membership on the parliamentary committee and the committee should spend a significant amount of time informing itself by hearing from the ministers and other special persons. It needs to develop a body of expertise that will help with respect to the support of the mission.

The motion goes on to say:

And it is the opinion of this House that the special Parliamentary Committee on Afghanistan should review the use of operational and national security exceptions...

I think it was Churchill who once famously said that truth is the first casualty of war. It may well have been someone else, but there is a large element of wisdom in that observation. This is the information age. This is an age where people expect to be informed. People expect to have information literally at their fingertips, something in Wikipedia, on Google or wherever, where they can make themselves informed and have informed opinions.

Gone are the days when government thinks it can control the information flow. Hopefully this parliamentary committee, in some small measure, will be able to inform Canadians to generate factual based information so that Canadians can inform themselves on the success and sometimes the failures of this mission. We want to see that kind of thing happening in the year 2008.

I respectfully submit that as we go forward we will actually not know what technologies will be available in 2009, 2010 and 2011 with respect to how Canadians receive information and how they form their opinions, but we can reasonably assume that Canadians will want more information rather than less information. I think this special committee will help with respect to providing information.

It is somewhat ironic that a government, which ran on transparency and accountability, needs to be dragged kicking and screaming into the year 2008 to form a special parliamentary committee that it has already agreed to by its support for its own motion.

• (1325)

As I say, it is somewhat ironic that an opposition party, the official opposition party, has to use up one of its opposition days to get the government of the day to support this motion.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to any questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the public's right to know is one of those fundamental cornerstones in any western democracy. The freedom of information and the flow of information is one of those checks and balances by which we ensure our government is operating the way that we want it. It provides scrutiny and shines the light of day on the operations of government.

I suppose the idea of this newly struck committee is to hopefully pry from the government some of the information about how the Afghan mission is being carried out, to wrestle some of that information from the government that it has been so reluctant to

share with Canadians through the normal avenues of recourse, such as the access to information laws.

I wonder if my colleague agrees with me that this particular government seems obsessed with secrecy about the Afghan mission.

I am holding a letter here from the Department of National Defence, an access to information coordinator's letter, telling our critic here that the department wants another 300 days to answer a fairly straightforward question about a press release it sent out recently. This is an additional 300 days to fill a fairly ATI straightforward request.

Will my colleague share his views on the culture of secrecy that the government has adopted?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I see that the latest technology was working in the case of the hon. member as well.

The irony here is resplendent. Here is a government that in the last campaign ran on accountability, transparency, et cetera, to the point where we actually got sick of listening to it. As soon as the Conservatives got into power they became, and I use the hon. member's phrase, engaged in a culture of secrecy.

Ultimately, information is power. Certainly, the government is intoxicated by power. There are therapies for that, by the way. Because it loves to control the power of information, it seems somewhat reluctant to set up this special committee, because this special committee would generate information which would inform Canadians and allow them to make an informed choice, make informed decisions with respect to the successes and failures of the mission.

There are some resplendent ironies in this particular motion in that we, as the Liberal Party, have to use up an opposition day to force the government to do what it said it would do in the last campaign and indeed, what it said last month regarding the support of the Afghan motion.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated hearing what the member had to say, but I would like to clear something up a little bit.

No one on the government side of the House has forced the opposition to come forward with the motion today. This was a motion that the opposition used. This was a motion that the Liberal Party brought forward.

The government has been very clear that it would be open and transparent. We were clear back when we said we wanted to extend the mission that it would take parliamentary approval, that it would take a debate in the House and approval. We also said it was contingent on a number of things. It was contingent on securing another 1,000 troops, on securing much more resources, and those things have been achieved.

Let me say that the government has achieved things from which the former Liberal government pushed away, in which it did not want to become involved, so we have made steps forward in this process on the Afghanistan mission and now we are moving into a number of other new areas.

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We are moving into the committee that would be responsible for looking at the mission in Afghanistan. We are always putting forward new ways of more clearly communicating what the government is doing. Why did the Liberal opposition party bring forward the motion when it knew the government would act on it?

• (1330)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the irony of this whole thing is that it took the Liberal Party in the first instance to redraft the government's motion, so that it made some coherent sense and actually adopted all of the Manley report, not just bits and pieces that the government chose.

Then the motion was adopted by a majority vote in the House and the government runs off and tries to secure the 1,000 troops, et cetera, which we support. We are happy about the government doing that. However, there is absolutely no reason in the world why it would not move to set up this special parliamentary committee which was part of the motion. That is an easy thing to do. It is simple.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the mission in Afghanistan is clearly a matter of great concern for most Canadians. Any time we as a nation send our courageous men and women into harm's way, it is essential that we undertake such a mission only after a full and thorough process of review and consideration.

All views, all opinions and all possibilities must be considered. There are many different things to consider when debating the mission in Afghanistan. A measure of the importance of this matter to our constituents across the country is the sheer volume of emails, letters and telephone calls we have received from those we represent.

I have personally met with many constituents who have deep reservations and considerable concerns about the mission in Afghanistan. I share many of these concerns. I am of course particularly concerned about the decision to extend the mission in view of the concerns that have been expressed about the success of this undertaking to date.

There have been 82 Canadians who have lost their lives in Afghanistan since the beginning of the mission. The financial cost of the mission has also been considerable. In May 2006, when the issue of extending the mission was put before Parliament, I voted against the extension because I truly believed it was the right thing to do. I did not vote in favour of the latest extension.

Regardless of the positions that members of Parliament took during the previous debate, a consensus has emerged which maintains that, if the mission must continue, it must also change. Canadians have made it clear that if we are to continue in Afghanistan, then our focus must be on reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

The debate as to when our troops will return home appears to have been settled, at least for the moment. We know that a date of 2011 has been set though I must confess to being somewhat concerned by the apparent wavering on the part of the Prime Minister at the Bucharest NATO summit regarding a specific end date.

Indeed, this very question was asked by my hon. colleague from Etobicoke—Lakeshore of the Prime Minister just yesterday and his only reply was that our allies did not need to ask. Canadians have

now been told that the end date is 2011 and we hope we are not now hearing the beginning of wavering on the part of the government.

Nonetheless, it has been decided that they will come home in 2011. While some members may claim the troops can be brought home tomorrow, the Government of Canada has made international agreements which cannot be abandoned lightly. However, that does not mean that we should extend *carte blanche* to the government.

Given the continuing operation of our soldiers in Afghanistan, Parliament has an obligation to ensure that the mission is being conducted in accordance with the will of Canadians and there simply must be a better framework of accountability. Indeed, the recent Afghanistan motion made reference to the need for more oversight and the transition from a combat mission to one focused on reconstruction.

As my colleague, the member for Toronto Centre and our party's foreign affairs critic, has stated, "The key thing to recognize is that an outright military victory in traditional terms is hard to achieve". I believe my hon. colleague is absolutely correct and I further believe that most Canadians and reasonable observers fully agree with his contention.

Therefore, it is, I believe, essential that we have enhanced oversight and accountability for the Afghanistan mission that is fair, constructive and responsive. The government owes it to this Parliament and to Canadians across the country to commit itself to greater accountability and oversight regarding the mission in Afghanistan.

As noted, the motion passed by the House calls for the formation of a committee to oversee the mission. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has not yet set up such a committee and it is essential that the government facilitate the movement forward on this commitment in the committee.

• (1335)

Today's motion is not about whether the mission should or should not have been extended. That issue, rightly or wrongly, has already been decided. Today's motion is about ensuring that the government lives up to its word and follows through on its commitment to the people of Canada and Parliament.

It is about showing Canadians that Parliament can work together for the better of our society and on an issue of such importance. It is about ensuring that our brave men and women in uniform are only asked to put their lives in danger for a mission that is consistent with the will of the Canadian people.

Finally, this motion will allow parliamentarians and Canadians the opportunity to better understand the mission in Afghanistan and to reassess how our resources are being allocated. There is no greater obligation for parliamentarians and government than to ensure that members of the armed forces who are put in harm's way are committed to such service with objectives that are attainable. These must also be circumstances that are productive within the context of a mission that is clear and understood.

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Greater accountability and oversight will, at the very least, provide for this opportunity. Accountability, oversight and transparency are the hallmarks of the democratic system of government. If we are not prepared to apply these principles to the mission in Afghanistan, then we are doing a great disservice to our country and to Parliament.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member a question with respect to the ironies of actually bringing this motion today.

Why is it that Canadians need this special committee? It is not the Liberal Party that needs a special committee. It is not the Bloc, the NDP or the Conservative Party that needs a special committee. It is Canada or Canadians that need this special committee.

Why is it that, so to speak, we have to bring the government kicking and screaming into this motion? Now it is apparently agreeing to support it, as is the NDP. I am not sure of the Bloc's position. What does he see Canadians getting out of this committee in terms of the benefit of information?

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I quite agree with my hon. colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood that it is kind of sad that we have a government that speaks about accountability and transparency but in fact does the exact opposite.

We in the opposition have to force the government constantly to be accountable and transparent to Canadians on an issue as important to Canadians and Parliament as the Afghanistan mission. We have to make sure we send clear signals to our men and women in uniform that we have a clear direction of where we are going.

Accountability is of great importance and the formation of this committee as soon as possible is extremely important to make sure that the government is in fact living up to the commitment it made to both Parliament and Canadians. I would hope it will do that with the unanimous support of the House because it is a motion that is worthy of support from all members, no matter where they stand on this issue.

• (1340)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, it was such a fine speech and he is such a fine speaker that he should have an opportunity to speak more fully. I would like his comments on the fifth Manley recommendation which says:

The Government should provide the public with franker and more frequent reporting on events in Afghanistan, offering more assessments of Canada's role and giving greater emphasis to the diplomatic and reconstruction efforts as well as those of the military.

Does he anticipate that this special committee is in fact a fulfillment of the fifth recommendation of Mr. Manley's report?

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, one of the recommendations that I thought was very striking in the Manley report, no matter how people felt about the report, was the whole issue that the government was certainly not communicating and being transparent enough with Canadians about this mission.

Part of the reason we are trying to force the government to in fact be more transparent and accountable is because we know that the success of this mission depends on transparency and accountability. We need to ensure that Canadians are aware of what is happening

there and we in Parliament must put everything in place to make sure we are accountable.

It is because Parliament has done it and the opposition has put forward a motion. It is not because the government has done anything about accountability and transparency when it comes to this mission.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope that my colleagues will allow me to take a few seconds of my time to greet the people in my riding, who have not seen me speak in Parliament for quite some time. I thank them for their patience, and I thank you for your patience.

I am happy to be taking part in this debate. I will comment on the motion, which I feel is important. It is important that the committee fulfill its mandate. The motion reads as follows:

That a special committee, consisting of 12 members, be appointed—

I noticed that members of the party in power were saying that, in any event, a committee was going to be created. The motion does refer to a committee, but that committee may need an even more specific mandate. Even though it is described in just a few words, this special committee from Canada will have more control over what happens in Afghanistan in terms of military action or services.

The motion states:

That a special committee, consisting of 12 members, be appointed to consider the Canadian mission in Afghanistan—

“Consider” and the French equivalent “examiner” should have the same meaning. To consider an issue is to look at it carefully, from all sides. I will continue reading the motion:

That a special committee, consisting of 12 members, be appointed to consider the Canadian mission in Afghanistan as referred to in the motion adopted by the House on March 13, 2008—

Since I was not here and did not take part in the debate, I looked at the motion of March 13. It seems to me that it will give this committee a great deal of work to do.

I should perhaps say that although the Bloc Québécois voted against the motion to extend our military presence in Kandahar, that does not mean that the Bloc is not interested in the mission. Far from it. The Bloc is especially interested in seeing the mission rebalanced to place greater emphasis on reconstruction and international assistance. In fact, as early as 2004, the leader of the Bloc made a major speech in which he urged the government to rebalance the mission to make it successful.

This committee, which will not be the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade or the Standing Committee on National Defence, which will continue to do their work—I do not see why they should not—will be responsible for ensuring that Canada's mandate—both the military mission and the reconstruction and development mission—is fully carried out.

In fact, I am basing this statement on the fact that, in the paragraph that describes the committee, we read that the House of Commons resolves as follows:

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that the House of Commons should strike a special parliamentary committee on Afghanistan which would meet regularly with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and National Defence—that cannot hurt—and senior officials, and that the House should authorize travel by the special committee to Afghanistan and the surrounding region—and this is where it gets interesting—so that the special committee can make frequent recommendations on the conduct and progress of our efforts in Afghanistan;

● (1345)

Where will those recommendations come from? It seems they will come from this review the committee is being asked to make of all the duties assigned, by the motion, to both the troops and the various government services.

I want to come back to this military mission that will also be considered by the committee. The mission must include the following points:

(a) training the Afghan National Security Forces so that they can expeditiously take increasing responsibility for security in Kandahar and Afghanistan as a whole;

“Expeditiously” is a term that seems specific, but it is rather vague. It is important to know what that means. How can we train these forces expeditiously?

The second point reads as follows:

(b) providing security for reconstruction and development efforts in Kandahar;

This issue of security for projects has been addressed quite often for a number of reasons by the witnesses we have heard in the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. For one thing, people who work with NGOs do not want to be associated with the military. They say it is more dangerous for them to be associated with the military than to take care of their own protection however they can. On the other hand, there are some truly dangerous situations where troops must intervene. In that case we are no longer talking about the provincial reconstruction team. It is clear that this entire situation needs to be reviewed.

The last point is the following:

(c) the continuation of Canada's responsibility for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team;

This is important, of course.

Here is the second mandate. In other words, it is also the opinion of the House:

that, consistent with this mandate, this extension of Canada's military presence in Afghanistan is approved by this House expressly on the condition that:

The express conditions are then set out, as the government member reminded us earlier, and here is the first condition:

(a) NATO secure a battle group of approximately 1,000 to rotate into Kandahar (operational no later than February 2009);

The leader of the Bloc Québécois raised the question yesterday of the 3,200 soldiers that will leave in October. Are they included in Mr. Manley's total or not?

Here is the second condition:

(b) to better ensure the safety and effectiveness of the Canadian contingent, the government secure medium helicopter lift capacity ... before February 2009;

It says that this condition must be met no later than February 2009. I would like to comment on this. There is a military base in my riding, but that is not why I am making this comment. Is it because I

am a mother of two boys? No, that is not why. I think anyone in Canada who has been watching what is going on has been shocked by the number of soldiers who have died because we did not have sufficient military equipment to prevent them from being blown up by improvised explosives. That is precisely why, it would seem, the motion is asking for helicopters.

However, why was this not done before? After all the money that has been spent on military equipment, why have we allowed these young men and women to be blown up and killed like that? I was going to say these lives have been lost for nothing, but of course no one should say such a thing. However, given the circumstances, one might be very inclined to think so. I think that is a flaw, a chink in the armour of this mission.

● (1350)

The third condition is that:

(c) the government of Canada immediately notify NATO that Canada will end its military presence in Kandahar as of July 2011—

We think that it is clear this time.

Another part of this motion is very important. It says that:

—it is the opinion of this House that the government of Canada, together with our allies and the government of Afghanistan,—which cannot do it alone—must set firm targets and timelines for the training, equipping and paying of the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, the members of the judicial system and the members of the correctional system;

This is an extremely important issue. How many times have we been told in committee that one of the biggest problems with getting the soldiers we train to stay, especially in the police force, is that the Taliban offers them more than their government offers? When the pay is that low, it is easy to understand why many of them went to work for the Taliban to earn more money in a shorter period of time and often under better conditions. This is a very important factor.

Next, it is resolved:

—that Canada's contribution to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan should:

(a) be revamped and increased—

This is an urgent matter. How many times have we been told that all of the money is going to the military and to corrupt officials? Ordinary citizens we have met with on certain occasions have said that this is scandalous. These billions of dollars are not going to the people; the money is being used to build castles for corrupt officials and to buy military equipment.

Also, Canada's contribution to reconstruction and development must:

(b) focus on our traditional strengths...the development of sound judicial and correctional systems and...political institutions...and the pursuit of a greater role for Canada—

Afghanistan needs to rebuild. I left out the fact that that was about Canada's role in addressing the drinking water problem, but that is very important. However, as we have often been told, it is clear that this cannot be done in two years.

Lastly, Canada's contribution must:

(c) address the crippling issue of the narco-economy—

Statements by Members

Many witnesses told us that the narco-economy and the poppy fields ensure the survival of farmers who would not be able to make a living otherwise. However, they also ensure the survival of the Taliban network through corruption. This is how the corrupt get rich. This corruption spreads to regions to the north, such as Kurdistan. It is happening everywhere.

What should we do? Some solutions take time. In any case, eradication is impossible in the short term. It would be too expensive in terms of police resources. It has been tried in certain areas, but it was expensive and it takes time. Another alternative is to buy the crops from the farmers to produce pharmaceuticals. It is important that the farmers not lose their resources.

We have spoken about transparency. It is urgent—and I am certain the government realizes it—that Canadians know what is really happening.

Since 2004, the Bloc has called for the appointment of a special United Nations envoy. The motion mentions this. We know that he has now been appointed. Mr. Kai Edie, a Norwegian, was recently appointed by Ban Ki-moon, thank goodness.

• (1355)

This motion also calls on the government to provide the public with franker, more regular and more frequent reporting and that, for greater clarity, the government should table in Parliament detailed reports on the progress of the mission in Afghanistan. That will also make work for the proposed House committee and create an obligation to get to the bottom of things and to not be stopped by the naysayers we will hear, inevitably.

At the end, there is also mention of the transfer of Afghan detainees and we have spoken about this at length in this House. Events have taken place that have tarnished Canada's international reputation.

This motion is full of good intentions. I understand that the committee cannot do this alone. Therefore, in terms of the government and other services, we must be willing to make sense of all this. We must not forget the context—a war—which I may talk about later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): At the end of oral question period, the hon. member will have three and a half minutes left to finish his speech.

Now we will move on to statements by members. The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

JUNO AWARDS

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, Calgary's renowned hospitality and vibrant spirit were once again on display as our city hosted the 37th annual Juno Awards.

Writers, artists, musicians and fans from across the country gathered to celebrate and recognize the abundance of musical talent that Canada has produced.

True to form, Calgary stepped up to the plate and put on the biggest and best Juno weekend ever. Highlighted by Calgarian Leslie Feist winning five awards, including album of the year, the Calgary Junos demonstrated the true heart of the new west.

As Juno winner and proud Calgarian Paul Brandt said:

This city has an incredible spirit, and even as the city of Calgary continues to grow, there's something about the heart and soul of Calgary that's small town and warm. Even though it's cosmopolitan and progressive, there's still a feel that we all care about each other and that was really obvious during the show...

On behalf of my colleagues who joined me in Calgary for the Junos, I want to thank and congratulate the organizing committee and volunteers, CARAS and the artists, and CTV for making this year's Junos the best ever.

* * *

• (1400)

VINCE RYAN MEMORIAL TOURNAMENT

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the organizers of the 19th annual Vince Ryan oldtimers hockey tournament held recently in my riding.

This year's event saw 160 teams compete in over 280 games. Teams from Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Ontario and British Columbia were treated to an incredible weekend of hockey and fellowship.

An army of over 200 volunteers kept score, cleaned rooms, shuttled teams and made meals for the over 3,000 participants.

The Vince Ryan tournament has grown to be recognized as one of the premier oldtimers hockey tournaments in this country. It brings a tremendous social and economic benefit to our community. All profits go toward the Glace Bay High School scholarship fund.

To the Ryan family, who remain proud to celebrate Vince's memory through this tournament, and to the chairman, the incomparable Richie Warren, and his organizing committee, I express thanks on behalf of the people from Cape Breton—Canso for their commitment to this great event and wish them the very best of luck with the 20th anniversary coming up next year.

* * *

[Translation]

COMPETITION FOR CORRECT FRENCH ON SIGNS

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, two of the award winners in the 11th annual J'affiche en français competition sponsored by the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste du Centre-du-Québec are from the RCM of Drummond. They are the Centre d'emploi pour femmes Partance in Drummondville and Ameublement Setlakwe in Saint-Germain-de-Grantham. This furniture store won the prize for correct French usage on the sign posting store hours and on price tags. The women's employment centre, Partance, won in the service business category.

Statements by Members

Out of the 40 establishments in the Centre-du-Québec region that entered this competition, 18 finalists were chosen. In addition to a certificate congratulating them on their correct French signage, the winners received \$250 and a plaque created by artist Suzanne Ricard, from Saint-Pie-de-Guire.

Congratulations to Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste du Centre-du-Québec for this brilliant initiative, as well as to the award recipients.

* * *

[English]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court calls access to information laws quasi-constitutional in their weight and import, and the public's right to know what their government is doing is a fundamental cornerstone of democracy, but the access to information system in this country is broken. It is a farce. It is completely dysfunctional. Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have refused to fix it.

It was the culture of secrecy that allowed corruption to flourish in the Liberal years. The Conservative government is even worse. The government is obsessed with secrecy. The Conservatives habitually abuse the use of section 15 exemptions under the act and they virtually deny access through unreasonable delays.

I am holding here one letter from National Defence headquarters that gives itself an extension of 300 days to fill a basic request for information. This is absurd.

The government is obsessed with secrecy. If we do nothing else in this minority Parliament, we must reform the Access to Information Act. The public has a right to know.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Canadian troops deployed in Afghanistan under the authority of NATO and the UN have just received the good news that they will soon receive some backup.

Our Prime Minister, who attended the NATO summit in Bucharest last week, convinced our allies to support Canada's mission to help the Afghan people. French and American soldiers will join the Canadian troops stationed in Kandahar. Furthermore, Poland has agreed to provide helicopters and additional equipment. These latest developments were made possible because of our Prime Minister's leadership. Once again, Canada is playing an important role on the international stage.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the soldiers from Valcartier, and particularly those from the Régiment de la Chaudière and the 6 Field Artillery Regiment based in Lévis who have been deployed in Afghanistan. I want them to know that what they have done every day in Kandahar and the surrounding area, as well as the concrete assistance they have provided to the Afghan people, is noble and important, not only in my eyes, but in the eyes of all Canadians. The people of Lévis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins are proud of you.

• (1405)

[English]

JUNO AWARDS

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate Fredericton's own Measha Brueggogsgoman, who received the 2008 Juno award for best vocal or choral performance at Sunday night's ceremonies.

Measha has emerged as one of the pre-eminent classical sopranos in the world. Having performed extensively in North America and internationally, she is critically acclaimed for her extraordinary voice, her remarkable versatility, the depth of her artistic commitment and her pure star quality.

Her recording *Surprise*, released in 2007, is a testament to her sensational voice and musicianship. I encourage everyone who is a fan of exceptional music to pick up her CD and enjoy it for themselves.

I extend congratulations to Measha Brueggogsgoman for winning this prestigious award. She makes her family, Fredericton and Canada proud.

* * *

TERRORISM

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is leading the world in the fight against terrorism. We have frozen aid to the Hamas government, led the fight against the Taliban and supported Israel at the United Nations.

Now Canada must confront Holocaust denier Mahmoud Ahmadijad, who is one of the world's top state sponsors of terror.

One way to confront him and other terrorist allies is through Bill S-225. The Conservative bill would allow Canadian terror victims and their families to take civil action in Canadian courts against those who finance terror.

The Liberal-dominated Senate is blocking the bill. With a massive Senate majority, the Liberals have the power to adopt this legislation now.

It is a new tool as we carry out this battle against terrorism. Let us cut off the money that fuels terrorism and bring justice to terrorist victims past, present and future.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC TOURISM AWARDS

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, many organizations from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, and particularly from my riding, were honoured on March 28, 2008, at the regional edition of the Grands prix du tourisme québécois.

Among the recipients were the Village-vacances in Petit-Saguenay, Hôtel Chicoutimi, the Festival International des Rythmes du monde in Saguenay, the Nouvelle Fabuleuse ou les Aventures d'un Flo, Hôtel la Saguenéenne and the Auberge des Battures.

Statements by Members

I would especially like to commend the tourism personality of the year, Louis Wauthier, who was honoured for his exceptional contribution to the new edition of the Fabuleuse histoire d'un royaume.

I commend the excellence of everyone involved in tourism in the Chicoutimi—Le Fjord riding and all the finalists from the entire region. Your contribution to the tourism industry is invaluable and allows us to carry on the tradition of warm hospitality that is so typical of the people of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

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[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader once asked, “Do you think it's easy to make priorities?”

It seems that these days the Liberal Party is certainly having trouble doing so. We hear one thing from the leader, another from the deputy leader and other things from the Liberal leader wannabes.

Let us take this recent example from last Friday at Concordia University, where the Liberal Party deputy leader gave a speech in which he discussed the idea of being a global citizen. He said:

I don't think you can be a good global citizen if you're not a good national citizen. The chief problem in the world is that not all people live in strong and capable states.

According to the deputy leader, creating a strong, capable state is a new and more important goal than solving global warming, ending poverty or fixing the north-south divide. He believes Canada's priority should be to assist in strengthening states rather than simply provide aid to poor countries.

Does his Liberal leader agree with these comments? Is this a new Liberal priority? Who is speaking for the Liberal Party? The Liberal Party does not know, Canadians do not know—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

* * *

[Translation]

DAVE RYAN

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to acknowledge in this House today Dave Ryan and his family, originally from Edmunston, in my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche.

Mr. Ryan, who is 80 years old, served Canada in the Korean War in 1950. His seven brothers served in World War II, a few years earlier.

[English]

The Ryan family set what is believed to be a national record in terms of the services of one family in the Canadian armed forces in the second world war and the Korean war.

While words can never adequately express our nation's gratitude, we remember the dedicated service the Ryan family has given to Canada.

● (1410)

[Translation]

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge this family that served in wartime. We wish to recognize Dave Ryan and his family as well as the family members of his brothers Percy, Thomas, Arthur, Earl, Don, Leo and Joseph. We thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

* * *

[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians look at the Liberal leader and his party, they see a party with no leadership. When Canadians wonder what the Liberal leader and his party stand for, they see a party with no policies.

When Canadians think of what their future would look like under a Liberal government, they see a party with no vision for our country. When Canadians wonder how the Liberal leader and his party would manage their hard-earned tax dollars, they see a party that, in addition to raising the GST, would put the country \$62.5 billion deeper into debt.

When Canadians look at the Conservative government, they see a government with no scandals, yet they see a Liberal leader and his party so desperate, they focus on make believe ones and have stooped so low by their attempt to invent scandals.

No leadership, no vision, no plan, no results, that is the Liberal approach. Leadership, vision, a plan, results, that is the Conservative approach.

* * *

[Translation]

VINCENT CORMIER

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with honour that I rise in this House to draw attention to the performance of an athlete from my riding. Vincent Cormier, of Robertville, won the senior national wrestling championships in the under 55 kg class held last weekend in Guelph, Ontario.

Vincent Cormier is a student at the University of New Brunswick who dreams of being a world champion. He trains with the Club de lutte Chaleur under Michel Côté. He is a strong Canadian contender for the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

Over the next few months, Vincent will participate in a tournament in Spain, two international tournaments as well as the Pan Am Games in Ecuador.

On behalf of the citizens of Acadie-Bathurst, myself and the NDP, I wish him good luck in his quest for gold. Congratulations, Vincent. We will be behind you cheering you on to reach your goals. We are proud of you. Good luck, Vincent.

Statements by Members

[English]

ALLAN CUP TOURNAMENT

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 100th Allan Cup Tournament, featuring teams from across Canada, will be held in Brantford, Ontario from April 14 to 19, hosted by the Brantford Blast.

The Allan Cup has a very distinguished history. It is a much revered championship, contested annually, representing senior hockey at the highest level in Canada. The owners of the Brantford Blast, Peter and Judy Ham, and General Manager Steve Cheeseman have worked long and hard to organize a tournament, which will be memorable for everyone involved.

From a local perspective, 10,000 students are being invited to attend the games and elementary schools will participate in a program entitled "Adopt a Team". Players from the adopted team will visit area schools to convey to students the importance of maintaining an active lifestyle, obviously including hockey and other physical activities.

I welcome all to attend the 100th Allan Cup tournament, and wish to convey the thanks of my constituents to the ownership and management of the Brantford Blast.

* * *

[Translation]

DROULERS-TSIIONHIAKWATHA ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE INTERPRETATION CENTRE

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 11, the Droulers-Tsiionhiakwatha Archeological Site Interpretation Centre in Saint Anicet received recognition at the 22nd Grands prix montréalais du tourisme québécois awards.

The archeological site in the Upper St. Lawrence region recreates a 15th century Iroquois village. It won the Tourism Attraction award for under 100,000 visitors for the Montérégie and will represent the region nationally on May 9.

The interpretation centre has been described as one of the top ten tourist attractions in Canada and received 11,000 visitors in 2007 in just four months of operation. It has had visitors from more than 42 countries since it opened in 2001.

This organization owes its reputation to the quality of its achievements and its client services and richly deserves our congratulations. I want to commend in particular Pascal Perron, Michel Cadieux and their entire team for their passion and their excellent work.

* * *

[English]

JIM CONNORS

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Jim Connors passed away last week. This was a man who made the world better, an outstanding lawyer, business executive and public servant, supremely dedicated to his wife, Cathy, and his children.

He was a leader in every aspect of his life, an optimistic, energetic, compassionate and vibrant man who tackled life, and perhaps more remarkably, tackled his own death. He was one of those people who made people happier, stronger and better, just by being Jim.

Knowing the seriousness of his illness, he fought furiously, managed his treatments, celebrated his victories and when appropriate, prepared to die. He fought hard for public coverage of a cancer drug that he could afford but others could not.

Jim's funeral took place yesterday in Dartmouth, a beautiful Nova Scotia April day. The sun seemed to reflect his optimistic outlook about life and death, and the hints of spring renewal serve to remind us of the next generation of Jim's family, his amazing children who will make their own significant contributions to this world.

Jim would be as proud of them as they are, and we all are, of him.

* * *

● (1415)

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, coming soon to a constituency near you is the embattled Liberal leader, and he is promising billions and billions of dollars of reckless new spending.

While the Liberal leader may not have a vision for the future of Canada, lacks the ability to set priorities and boasts the worst environment record of any environment minister in the history of Canada, he has demonstrated that, if given the chance, he would spend in historic fashion.

In what ways, my colleagues ask. For example he has proposed the following GST increases: 1% for social housing; 1% for reduced corporate taxes; 1% for child tax benefit; 1% for a green tax initiative; 1% for transfers to cities; 1% for debt pay down; and 1% to cut emissions. The result would be a 12% GST.

Perhaps during the next few stops of the Liberal leader's tax hike tour, he might be so kind as to empty his knapsack of secrecy and tell us exactly how he would propose to finance the balance of his close to \$70 billion of reckless new Liberal spending pledges. Just how much is Liberal generosity going to cost us on our tax bill?

* * *

[Translation]

MEMORIAL CUP

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the people in my riding are known for their great competence and savoir-faire, to the point that the Canadian Hockey League's host-city selection committee chose Rimouski to host the 2009 Memorial Cup tournament.

There is no question that the legendary hospitality of the people of Rimouski tipped the scales in favour of this Lower St. Lawrence city. Players such as Sidney Crosby, Vincent Lecavalier, Brad Richards, Michel Ouellet and the other former Océanic players have also been extraordinary ambassadors for our region.

Oral Questions

Congratulations to the bidding committee, to the Océanic team, to all the people of Rimouski and to the people of the Lower St. Lawrence who will come out for the 2009 Memorial Cup tournament.

Rest assured that hockey fans will have a front row seat at this memorable tournament. You will all be very welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion the House passed on March 13 on the mission in Afghanistan was not a blank cheque. It was a contract between the government and the House. Central to the motion was the creation of a special committee of the House on the mission in Afghanistan.

Will the Prime Minister support the Liberal motion today, including its timeline that compels the government to create, without further delay, this much needed committee?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the pouting professor never ceases to surprise me. We worked together to come up with a common, non-partisan position, on which we all agreed, to extend the mission in Afghanistan. We very much appreciate the support of the Liberal Party for that.

We are in accord today on the motion that the committee should be established, which is reflected in the motion. Of course we intend to move forward with it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, basically, the March 13 motion centred on the government's obligation to be accountable and transparent—an obligation that has been woefully lacking in the past. In this spirit of transparency and accountability, it is high time the Prime Minister began giving us some clear answers to our questions on Afghanistan.

For example, did he unequivocally tell our NATO allies that Canada's military mission in Kandahar will end in 2011?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the House of Commons have been very clear. Our military mission will end in 2011.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we still do not know if they clearly told NATO as much.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister and his Minister of National Defence like to talk about all the conditions being met, but we do not know the specifics.

When will the U.S. troops show up? How long is their commitment? How much will the Polish helicopters cost? How long will we have them? What about those UAVs we have been promised? When will they arrive?

● (1420)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the pouting professor has time coming to positions. I know it took a long—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I do not know to whom the hon. government House leader was referring, but that is the second time we have heard this expression. I sense it was intended for some other hon. member. If so, I think it would be inappropriate to use that kind of language. I would urge him to stick with the usual reference of an hon. member.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, it did take the Liberal leader some time to come to the position where he was prepared to support the extension of the mission in Afghanistan. We were pleased, after several months, that he did that and we were able to move forward in a spirit of cooperation between the parties.

It was only last week that we had the commitment of the other NATO allies to provide the reinforcements in Afghanistan, which we are obtaining. I would expect the members of the opposition would be celebrating the fact that we have succeeded in meeting those objectives, which they themselves wanted to see met.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has been criticized throughout its mandate, most recently by the Manley panel, for failing to tell the truth about the Afghan mission. This pattern of evasion continues.

Parliament extended the mission on the explicit understanding that the mission would change and focus upon reconstruction and training.

I ask the government yet again, did the Prime Minister tell our NATO allies in Bucharest that the Canadian effort after 2009 would change and focus on reconstruction and training, or did he say, "Boys, it's business as usual"?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would invite the deputy leader of the party opposite to reread the motion. It is certainly clear to everyone that—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Did you tell them?

Hon. Peter MacKay: The hon. member should calm herself, Mr. Speaker.

I would invite the hon. member to read the motion. It is clear to everyone who was there at the meeting in Bucharest that, yes, there is transformation taking place. There is greater emphasis on redevelopment and reconstruction and greater emphasis on the training that is being put forward to up the security of the Afghan national army and police. Yes, it is changing each and every day in Afghanistan.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is not clear. Transformation is one thing, change is another. The Manley report criticizes the government for its lack of leadership and clarity when it comes to Afghanistan. Once again, we are asking the government to give a clear answer.

Did the Prime Minister clearly tell his NATO allies that Canada's role will change after 2009, to focus on reconstruction and development?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that there are changes. There is greater security on the ground in Afghanistan. It is clear that all our NATO allies are making an effort to increase security.

At the same time, we must also focus our efforts on reconstruction and development, in cooperation with the Afghan government. There are always changes taking place on the ground in Afghanistan and the situation is improving.

* * *

AIRBUS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his report, Mr. Johnston recommends confidential interviews for the inquiry into the Schreiber-Mulroney affair. But it is because of the public nature of the testimony heard in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics that we learned that significant amounts of cash had been paid to Brian Mulroney by Karlheinz Schreiber.

Will the Prime Minister admit that if he truly wants to shed light on the Mulroney-Schreiber affair he has to ensure that the inquiry is as broad as possible and entirely public?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Mr. Johnston's recommendations differ from what the Leader of the Bloc Québécois is saying. Mr. Johnston's report reads:

While I would not wish to tie the Commissioner's hands, and I maintain the recommendation that the Commissioner be authorized to determine his or her own procedure, this further reflection reinforces my view that the Commissioner should explore opportunities to conduct portions of the investigation and inquiry in a more efficient manner than the court-like "traditional" Canadian public inquiry procedure

• (1425)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is all well and good, but what is the government's position? If the revelations on the cash payments had not been public, we never would have known about them. It is because this was disclosed publicly that we know about it today. The public felt this was somewhat unusual and so did Mr. Johnston.

Does the Prime Minister believe that with a narrow inquiry that is partially confidential he will restore the public's confidence in democratic institutions? Will hiding or withholding things help restore this confidence?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The decision will ultimately be made by the inquiry commissioner. The purpose of Professor Johnston's suggestions is to make the inquiry or process more efficient.

[English]

The objective here is simply to ensure that there is a balance between the public interest in getting the facts dealt with and ensuring that the costs of the commission of inquiry do not run out of control.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when he was in opposition, the Prime Minister said that the government should respect the will of the House. Now, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics is recommending that the commission of inquiry be given a broad mandate so that it can study all aspects of the financial arrangement between Mr. Schreiber and Mr. Mulroney, including the Airbus affair.

Should the government not respect the will of the House and hold a wide-ranging public inquiry in order to clarify the treatment of the retainers received by Mr. Mulroney, which Mr. Johnston himself described as unusual?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government chose to ask an independent third party who was not affected by partisan interests to advise it on the best way to conduct a public inquiry that would be meaningful to Canadians.

Mr. Johnston recommended holding a public inquiry in the public interest. The government intends to implement the recommendations made by this independent adviser.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, who criticized the Liberal government's culture of entitlement, is doing exactly the same thing. Like Jean Chrétien, the Prime Minister prefers to sweep everything under the rug, for fear of being tainted by scandal.

Instead of hiding everything, will he hold a wide-ranging public inquiry in order to shed light on the Mulroney-Schreiber affair?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government indicated from the start that it would follow the recommendations made by Mr. Johnston as an independent third party, and that is what we intend to do.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can see what is happening here. The government is trying to carefully craft a balance between the public's access to the information about the Mulroney-Schreiber affair and the interest of the public to get at the truth, and the interest of the Conservative Party, which is going to deep-six it, drive it into private inquiries, and take it out of the public eye.

Oral Questions

I remember the Prime Minister saying that this was a commitment to a public inquiry. I also remember him saying that he would have a moral obligation to follow the will of the House of Commons, which I remind him said that it should be fully public.

Will the government amend the terms of reference and make the inquiry public, the way it should be?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the inquiry will be public and it will have the ability to look into whatever matters the commissioner sees fit.

Seventeen questions have been identified by Professor Johnston for investigation that he sees as touching on the public interest and as being legitimate questions that have not yet been answered. Those questions will be explored fully.

All that Professor Johnston has suggested is that the commissioner explore options for doing so efficiently and on matters that are not terribly relevant, that may be peripheral, that he look at alternative procedures. He suggested several examples from other commissions of inquiry where it has worked very well.

* * *

• (1430)

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): We have that right here in the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker. That is what we saw right there. That is another example of why working families cannot trust the Conservative government, and the list goes on.

Let me give the House another example. It was five weeks ago that the Prime Minister finally succumbed to the pressure to have an investigation into the NAFTA-gate leak, which of course ended up right in the middle of the U.S. primaries.

My questions are very simple. Has the Clerk of the Privy Council finished the investigation? When are we going to get a full and public report tabled right here in the House, or are we going to see the same old whitewash, deep-sixing of that information just like we are seeing with Mulroney-Schreiber?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am alarmed to hear the comments of the leader of the NDP with regard to Professor Johnston, because it was not long ago that he actually said, “Everything I know about Mr. Johnston suggests that he’s a good person to be involved here”.

That is why we agreed and that is why we indicated we would follow his recommendations. We are going to continue to follow his recommendations.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to falsely claim her government’s proposed reforms will tackle the immigration backlog, but they explicitly do not apply to people in the queue before February 2008.

Picking and choosing future priority categories based on her personal preferences will do nothing to help those who have been waiting in line.

When will the minister admit that these reforms are not designed to tackle the backlog but to create an arbitrary selection process in Canada’s immigration system?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that it was her government that received the mandamus decision from the court. It said that going forward all applications must be processed under the rules that were in place at the time they were received. The Liberals lost that one in the courts.

Going forward we will be able to set categories after consulting with the provinces and territories, after consulting with other departments, and after getting cabinet approval. We will be able to set these instructions to guide our immigration officials so they can help us get more immigrants here faster.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the minister has failed to explain how these measures will eliminate the current backlog.

This is about a power grab by the minister and nothing else. She is taking existing measures that are transparent and accountable and putting them in her pocket without accountability and without transparency. These draconian measures will do nothing to fix the backlog.

Why will the minister not just admit that her government does not trust her own department to do its job and that accountability means nothing to her and her government?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us see what Angelo Persichilli said about this in the *Hill Times*:

—what we don’t need are lectures from the Liberals on this issue because, again, according to the numbers, not the demagoguery, they too badly mismanaged this issue for political reasons.

The difference between Conservatives and Liberals is that the former [the Conservatives] are handling immigration by trying to get results, the latter [the Liberals] to get votes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we still do not know how the minister will decide which types of people will be able to immigrate to Canada, and which will not.

Could the minister give us some concrete examples of the new categories she will create to help decide who will be told, “Welcome to Canada”? Specifically, what are the categories?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, we want to welcome more immigrants, earlier and faster than before. We will designate which categories of people the country needs. We will respect the Charter and the law. We will welcome the people we need—to reunite families and to fill jobs.

[*English*]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister claims that the new rules will eliminate the backlog. On what date will the backlog in fact be eliminated?

Oral Questions

The minister claims that she wants to have an efficient immigration and refugee system. Then why has she failed to fill 58 IRB vacancies, resulting in the tripling of pending refugee claims?

The minister claims that she is pro immigration. Then why has the Conservative government accepted 36,000 fewer landed immigrants into Canada?

• (1435)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to helping genuine refugees. That is why I recently announced in the House that we will be doubling the number of convention refugees that we receive from Iraq.

Coming to Canada is a privilege and not a right. To make sure that we have the best people in place to do that, we have made over 100 appointments to the IRB, but the difference between us and the Liberals is we make sure those individuals are qualified and competent to do their job. With us, they actually have to pass a test to get in.

* * *

[Translation]

MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Beauce, the Baronet furniture factory: closed; the Éclaireur printing works: closed; Romaro roofing manufacturers: closed; Cavalier textiles: closed. A total of 1,200 jobs lost in 2007. The Minister of Industry, like his predecessor, the member for Beauce, are sticking to their Conservative laissez-faire ideology.

Can the Minister of Industry explain why, since the Conservatives came to power, the number of manufacturing sector jobs in Beauce was at its lowest point in 10 years last year? Can he explain why that is?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec exists to support entrepreneurs who want to start businesses and those who want to grow their businesses. We put new tools in place and we also created a \$1 billion trust to better support the manufacturing sector, in addition to bringing in capital cost allowance measures to enable entrepreneurs to buy new equipment and benefit from accelerated amortization.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, because of the Conservative government's laissez-faire policy—which was advocated by the former minister of Industry, the member for Beauce, who has been bragging about being in power—the manufacturing sector has been in crisis for two years.

Is the Minister of Industry aware that his tax cuts are not helping the manufacturing sector, which is not making a profit, and that this measure is putting even more money into the pockets of big oil companies?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend might speak to some of the great things that are happening in the province of Quebec and, in particular, in the aerospace industry. It is an industry that is flourishing. It is a Canadian industry. We are among the best people in the world. Factories are full. The individuals in that industry are trained to a high level of capability to work in this industry. In fact, industry continues to try to find more workers to work in aerospace in Quebec.

Instead of naysaying what is happening and what we are achieving in the Canadian economy, we should celebrate our successes.

* * *

[Translation]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, more than 200 workers at the Jeffrey mine in Asbestos will lose their jobs in a few months, when the mine closes for an indefinite period next July. Many of these workers could benefit from an older worker support program, which would allow them to reach retirement age with dignity.

Does the minister plan on making this program available to them or will he tell them, as did the Minister of Labour recently, to go to Alberta?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since coming to power in 2006, this government has approved almost 700 projects throughout Quebec, for a total of some 16,000 jobs maintained and created. Of course we have tools in place and soon the Blackburn II plan will arrive with new tools.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: It will arrive with new tools, well-suited to the Quebec regions.

[English]

The Speaker: Order, order. Members are entitled to use their own names. It is other names they have trouble with.

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was not referring to a virtual program, I was referring to a POWA. I will try another question.

After 130 years of operations, the Bell mine in Thetford Mines is closing its doors putting 140 minors out of work. The Secretary of State (Agriculture) and member for Mégantic—L'Érable has just applauded his colleague who wants nothing to do with an income support program for older workers. What does he think of this situation? Will he also tell these miners to go work in Alberta?

Oral Questions

●(1440)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government sees the great potential in older workers. That is why we continue to provide all kinds of support to help them make the transition from businesses and industries that are struggling to those that are vibrant.

I would remind the member that over 90,000 net new jobs have been created in Quebec over the last year. We need to fill some of those jobs, so we are providing all kinds of new training, including the targeted initiative for older workers, among a suite of programs, to make sure they can make that transition successfully.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the adviser chosen by the Prime Minister himself published a report that fails to understand the fundamental characteristic of a public inquiry—that it be public.

Setting limits on the mandate and holding parts of the inquiry behind closed doors will only leave Canadians with more questions. In particular, did Mulroney preserve the integrity of the Prime Minister's office?

The Prime Minister must stop protecting Mulroney. Will the commissioner have all of the powers laid out in the Inquiries Act? Yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the inquiry will be public. That is clear in the recommendations. The question then becomes what questions will be dealt with there. Professor Johnston has laid out quite clearly the 17 questions that touch on the public interest that he believes should be resolved. We expect that will happen very soon.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for a public inquiry lies with the Prime Minister. He cannot hide behind David Johnston or anybody else.

Important evidence in this affair should not be examined behind closed doors. It is precisely because Mulroney concealed his dealings with Schreiber that we are faced with all of this in the first place. Unless the mandate and the investigative powers are broad enough to actually follow the money, this exercise will not achieve the finality Canadians deserve.

It is in the Prime Minister's hands. Will he give Canadians a serious public inquiry, yes or no? Will the inquiry cover Fred Doucet?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from the start, we indicated that we would be looking to an independent third party to provide advice on how to go forward in this matter, so as to remove it from what would otherwise be partisan political exercises. For that reason, we asked Professor Johnston to

take on that very serious responsibility, which he has done with the appropriate level of seriousness and diligence.

His recommendations are on the table. It was always our intention, we said, to follow those recommendations before they were tabled. Now that they have been tabled, we still intend to follow those recommendations.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wanted to bring down the Liberal government in May 2005. The problem for him—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for York Centre has the floor.

Hon. Ken Dryden: The problem for him was that the vote would be so close that Mr. Cadman's vote might make the difference.

Mr. Cadman was terminally ill and had a big incentive not to defeat the Liberals, the parliamentary life insurance policy. Even if an offer to him would only neutralize an incentive which should not exist, the problem was that such an offer would be illegal. It would be about buying a vote to bring down a government. That is as bad as it gets.

To the Prime Minister: Is that what happened?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, we did want to bring down the Liberal government in May 2005. However, we are pleased that the Liberals are not interested in bringing this government down today.

Over the last two years the Liberals have allowed the Conservative government to pass three budgets and two extensions to the Afghan mission. They passed our crime package and our environment plans. This week or next, they are going to pass our immigration proposals and our immigration reforms.

With political enemies like that, who needs friends.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 1972 there was a break-in at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee in Washington. Described at the time as a third-rate burglary, with the obstruction of justice and perjury which followed, it brought down a president.

Here, if the Cadmans are right and the Prime Minister's words say what they seem to say, this is no third-rate burglary. This is about buying a vote to bring down a government. Imagine how CNN, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* would cover this.

To the Prime Minister: Tell us how all this happened.

●(1445)

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here he goes again with his imagination. The reality is there was no offer of a million dollar life insurance bribe to Chuck Cadman. That allegation by the Liberals is entirely false.

Oral Questions

As for the rest of my hon. colleague's question, I am afraid I have no comment on the Watergate scandal as it happened two years before I was born.

* * *

CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past year Canadians have begun to question the safety of the products they and their families use. For more than a decade, the Liberal government allowed our product safety regulations to fall far behind our international partners. Our government is getting the job done for Canadians. Last summer the Minister of Health told Canadians this government would be taking serious action on consumer safety.

Would the minister please update this House on what the government intends on doing in order to help restore Canadian confidence in products made abroad?

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is a great day for Canadians. Today, the Prime Minister, along with the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Health, announced new legislation to restore Canadians' confidence. The legislation will improve the government's ability to act quickly and decisively when unsafe products are found and will hold the industry accountable when they are found to be unacceptable.

Canadians expect this government to act and, unlike the previous government, we are acting decisively.

* * *

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, working families are sitting down to budget and plan for their summer vacations. Flipping through the newspaper ads, one would think there was a fire sale on air travel in Canada. However, that is not the case. When travellers are confronted with a mountain of outrageous fees that are not advertised in the ads themselves, suddenly, the vacation is not so affordable. Airlines are gouging customers, hiding fees and suckering unsuspecting customers.

Will the minister heed the advice of consumer groups and professional travellers, and use his powers that he currently has to force airlines to advertise only the actual price?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has acted in that regard. We brought in the Transportation Act. In this case we have asked Parliament to support legislation that would oblige airlines to inform the public and to indicate the prices that are being charged.

I would encourage all consumers to go to the least amount that they will be spending, in terms of purchasing any tickets, and as good consumers do, generally speaking, get all the information.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this minister had eight months to protect consumers and has yet to do so.

CBC's *Marketplace* proved that Canadian customers are getting gouged by the airlines. Surcharges can actually run the ticket up another 50%. That is not fair and we can stop the gouging.

Canada's travel professionals and consumer groups have created the travel protection initiative and demand the minister use his current authority to ensure truth in advertising for the public. This action would provide the needed transparency and accountability that other people in other countries already receive.

Why is the Minister of Transport grounded in his own fog while he is letting the airlines fly away with unfair profits on the backs of Canadians?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will tell my hon. colleague as well as members of the House that we have put in place an open skies policy. That policy enables us to drive prices down in this country for the betterment of all consumers who decide to take an aircraft.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the manufacturing sector contributes over \$613 billion and approximately 1.8 million jobs to the Canadian economy. Canada's manufacturing and auto sector was once the envy of the world. Now it is in dire straits, losing jobs every day.

When is the government going to have a specific plan for the auto sector to back this mainstay of our economy and show some respect for the auto workers and their families?

● (1450)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly the auto industry is not in the dire circumstances that my friend portrays.

Last year in Canada we produced 2.6 million automobiles. We are among the best people in the world on automobile assembly.

Frankly, the main issues facing the automotive industry and manufacturing are competitiveness issues, issues that the Liberals never previously addressed. The state of infrastructure, the state of safety, harmonization of regulatory standards, the development of a dominant fuel standard with the United States, all of the issues that languished under the Liberal government we are dealing with.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the CAW says.

When Canada had a Liberal government, we provided real support for our auto sector. The Conservatives, like the member for Essex, used to pay lip service to helping the auto sector when they were in opposition, but now, there is nothing but silence.

Oral Questions

The Government of Ontario has pledged \$17 million to help reopen and expand the Ford plant in Essex. This out of touch government has refused to match this.

Ontario is in. Ford is in. Why do they not have a partner in Ottawa?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Speaking of partners in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, I am not aware that the CAW had assumed a seat on that side of the House, but evidently it has.

In terms of working together, the most recent budget contained an automotive innovation fund. I continue to work together with executives from Ford, General Motors and other companies dealing with that fund and the parameters of it. We continue to have regular meetings with industry officials as well as union and worker representatives.

The auto industry in this country will continue to flourish. It is a sound industry. We are competitive and we will be good at it.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves. Why is the Conservative government doing nothing to stem the slow death of the 250,000 strong well-paying jobs we have in Ontario, jobs created by the up to now innovative and world leading auto sector?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my friend to the House. To carry on dealing with things that were not dealt with, this government is taking care of infrastructure. My friend of course was not in the House, but at the time that there was a Liberal government in this country, we allowed a situation to develop. The Detroit-Windsor bridge crossing is a single bridge built before the Great Depression and carries more trade than the entire United States-Japanese trading relationship.

Yet, this bridge is beyond capacity. The former government did nothing about it. This government is addressing it. It is at the top of our priorities and we will fix that bridge situation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Order. I know the member for Willowdale is very popular, but we have to be able to hear the question. The hon. member for Willowdale has the floor.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his generous welcome and I would like to point out that my question really did not have to do with bridges. It had to do with jobs.

Once again, the Conservative government, instead of finding solutions for the many families who are losing their livelihoods, is only blaming Ontario. It is time to stand up with Ontario. These Canadian families are asking, why are the Conservatives letting them down?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I can assist the hon. member in bridging from bridges to jobs, the truth of the matter is that this bridge is central to our automotive industry and to the competitiveness of our industry.

The former government did not appreciate that. That is why the bridge is jammed up. That is why there are 8,000 tractor trailer units a day using the bridge, sometimes taking up to eight hours. We cannot be competitive if we allow that to persist. The former

government did not do anything about it. It relates to jobs. We are dealing with it.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HERITAGE BUILDINGS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fire that ravaged the armoury in Quebec City has left a horrible scar on the urban landscape of the city's historic district. The reconstruction will be a lengthy process, and the festivities to mark the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City will continue despite this tragic event.

What proposals does the government plan to make for activities at the site during the festivities, pending reconstruction of the armoury?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec City suffered a terrible fire last weekend. We are working and holding discussions with various local partners.

Of course, for the 400th anniversary celebrations, it is important to us that this site be preserved, be attractive and be a source of pride for all Quebecers.

• (1455)

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is one of the partners in the 400th anniversary festivities. The armoury was a jewel in the urban landscape of Quebec City. It is the heritage minister's responsibility to make alternate proposals immediately so that the stakeholders can discuss them as soon as possible.

Need we remind the minister that the festivities began on January 1, 2008?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are already working hard to find a solution so that the site continues to be a source of pride during the 400th anniversary celebrations, despite the fire that took place on the weekend.

* * *

[*English*]

GRAIN TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently the Canadian Wheat Board and Canadian Federation of Agriculture released a report which found that in 2006-07 the railways gouged western grain farmers again, this time to the tune of \$175 million.

The Conservative government's first act was to abolish farmer control over grain cars. Now it is complicit in allowing the railways to gouge farmers an additional \$175 million. Will the minister finally show some accountability to farmers and call a full rail costing review, not a service review, but a full costing review?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to get the question from the member for Malpeque. One of the first initiatives we took was to stop the sale of hopper cars, which was something the previous government wanted to do.

It was an excellent decision because it was something the marketplace wanted. On top of that, it was a way of diminishing and reducing the costs to the farmer. That is what this government intends to continue to do.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first it was the Liberal MP for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca who wanted to keep dumping raw sewage into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Now another Liberal MP can be added to the list: the new Liberal member for Vancouver Quadra. As B.C.'s environment minister, she gave the thumbs-up to continue pumping over 40 billion litres of raw sewage into waters off Victoria.

Can the Minister of the Environment explain why federal Liberals support the dumping of raw sewage in Victoria and what the government is doing to fix this problem in my home province of British Columbia?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the leader of the Liberal Party would appoint as vice-chair of the Liberal environment committee a woman who supported dumping raw sewage into the Pacific Ocean off the coast of British Columbia. The leader of the Liberal Party of Canada has appointed a woman who the Sierra Club of Canada said “was at the helm for the most regressive time of rollbacks for the environment in B.C. history”.

Our government is taking real action to bring out a tough new regulation to ban the dumping of raw sewage in our oceans. We will get the job done.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* shows there are 1,760 boil water advisories in effect across the country. This is not over one year or even two years. This is 1,760 boil water advisories in effect across Canada and affecting Canadians today, including 530 in British Columbia and a whopping 679 in Ontario.

The government committed to a clean water strategy in the throne speech, but since then we have seen nothing. How much longer will Canadian families have to wait for this government to make a water law with real teeth?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a pretty good question. Let me tell the member about some of the things we are doing.

We are bringing in regulations to ban the dumping of secondary raw sewage into our lakes, rivers and oceans. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is putting up to \$8 billion to help municipalities build new waste water treatment facilities. We are finally beginning to clean up Lake Winnipeg. We are investing in cleaning up our Great Lakes. The most polluted site, Hamilton harbour, will be cleaned up.

We are taking real action. We are getting the job done.

• (1500)

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we do not want an ad hoc list of projects. We want a law to protect drinking water.

The author of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* report, Dr. Hrudehy, says, “The fact that we have so many boil water advisories, and many of them have been in place for years, means we're not fixing the problem”. The author suggests that the current boil water advisories he found are “the minimum”. He says, “There's probably more than that”.

When will the government bring in national water standards?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are taking real action. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has a plan on our first nations reserves, getting the job done.

When we brought forward funding for the Great Lakes, cleaning up Lake Winnipeg and finally taking real action on fighting bad water quality, the NDP could be counted on every single time to stand up and vote against clean water.

We need the NDP's help. I ask those members to please join us in our battle to clean up Canada's water.

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[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2007, at the G-8 summit in Germany, the Prime Minister said, and I quote:

[English]

Canada has recently completed a nation-wide consultation process involving stakeholders with the Canadian extractive sector (mining, oil and gas) in developing countries. Implementation of the recommendations from this process will place Canada among the most active G8 countries in advancing international guidelines and principles on corporate social responsibility.

[Translation]

The Conservative government has been dragging its feet on this issue for over a year. When will we finally get an answer?

[English]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have had consultations throughout the industry and with stakeholders throughout the process. We are moving forward on this file. We believe we will have something very good to announce shortly to the Canadian people for the extractive sector.

*Business of supply***PUBLIC TRANSIT**

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, public transit helps to cut commute times, reduces congestion on our roads and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Although responsibility for public transit is shared between local and provincial governments, addressing these needs in Canadian communities requires cooperation among all levels of government.

Can the Minister of Transport explain how our federal government has worked with the provinces and territories to improve public transit?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague asks a timely and most appropriate question. Federal investment in public transit has reached \$1 billion per year in this country, and that is thanks to the building Canada plan.

Addressing transit needs in Canadian communities requires cooperation among all levels of government. That is why in budget 2008 we set aside \$500 million in support of capital investments to improve public transit over the next two years. That trust supports, of course, rapid transit, transit buses and high occupancy vehicles. We are getting the job done for Canadians.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Wayne Elhard, Minister of Highways and Infrastructure for Saskatchewan; the Honourable Norman Yakeleya, Minister of Transportation for the Northwest Territories; the Honourable Ron Lemieux, Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation for Manitoba; and the Honourable Kevin Falcon, Minister of Transportation for British Columbia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

• (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

REMARKS DURING DEBATE ON OPPOSITION MOTION

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): I am not sure if this is a question of privilege or a point of order, Mr. Speaker, but it relates to debate on the Liberal motion earlier. I rose to challenge the hon. member for Scarborough Centre on what I felt were some misrepresentations he made. In the course of my remarks, I said, “Our ministers have visited committees dozens of times”. His response to me was: “I say this publicly now: I will resign if he is correct, and let him resign if he is not correct on that statement...”.

For the record, ministers have visited committees related to Afghanistan roughly 29 times. I am not a math major, but I think that is dozens. However, I have great personal respect for the member for Scarborough Centre, so I will assume he misheard what I said and will not even ask for an apology. I have great respect for the great work that he does on the defence committee, so neither will I ask for his resignation, notwithstanding his kind and sincere offer to do so.

The Speaker: That appears to dispose of the question. Whether it was a question of privilege or a point of order, I am not sure, but I do not think further intervention is required.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion and the amendment.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île had the floor. She has a little over three minutes left. I invite her to continue with her remarks now.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was just wrapping up. I was saying that all of the problems in Afghanistan, which the committee proposed in the motion would examine in order to make recommendations, are happening in a wartime context. No one can deny that.

The Bloc Québécois was against the motion to extend the military presence in Kandahar until 2011. The Bloc agreed to fulfill the commitment until February 2009, but the Bloc believes that Canada, Canadian soldiers, Quebeckers, and Quebec soldiers should be proud of what they have done.

We believed that other countries should step up, and we asked them to. Personally, I asked them to do so during two parliamentary assemblies overseas. That is what NATO should be. NATO should not be just a few countries taking on more difficult, dangerous and serious responsibilities than others.

This will not stop the Bloc from participating in the committee. On the contrary, we recognize that the soldiers are doing a good job, and now we have to protect them and get started on reconstruction and development. That is our position on the issue.

Some people say that this war should be ended diplomatically, that diplomacy would be easy. I invite them to read a text written by two young intellectuals, Marc-André Boivin and Lorraine Oades, who warn against believing in easy conflict resolution with the Taliban, as represented by who knows who. At the moment, members of the Taliban come from various backgrounds, have risen to power through violence, have made extreme demands and, above all, project the image of a confident organization on the road to victory.

Negotiating with the Taliban is not the way to safeguard the advantages gained and the progress achieved for women.

Business of supply

I hope that this motion will be passed, even though we were against extending our presence in Kandahar and against ongoing participation in this war, because we do not think that a military victory can resolve this situation. Yes, we have to ensure security. Yes, we have to resist the Taliban and send them back to Pakistan, but a war against a people that has already had enough is not the right way to make that happen.

• (1510)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will soon have been in this House for 15 years and, in my opinion, one of the issues that has been the most poorly handled by successive governments is that of Afghanistan.

Let us recall the debates in this House when the current Minister of National Revenue, who was then the Conservative Party defence critic, asked about 15 questions about the relevance of the mission, the objectives to be met and the consideration of an exit strategy. Yet, when the Conservative Party formed the government, this debate disappeared. They held a vote—a very rushed event—on extending the mission, which we initially opposed. It was agreed to respect Canada's commitment abroad.

Obviously we cannot rewrite history, but can my colleague tell me if this was not the right attitude to have from the beginning, before we first embarked on the war in Afghanistan and this international mission? The committee that will be put in place will perhaps be able to adopt this attitude after the fact, unfortunately. Taking a closer look at the outset would have been better.

So far, the western world has not necessarily shown the Afghans that our way of doing things is worth adopting for the future of development in this country. We have put too much emphasis on the military aspect instead of the two other aspects: diplomacy and development.

Is there not still a major change that must take place, given that Canada's mission should, in my opinion, end in February 2009?

In light of the decision made in this House, what actions should be taken to fix our mistaken intervention?

To start with, should we not respond to the questions asked earlier by the Conservative defence critic? Now that they are in power, they have not responded in any way that will allow us to get back on the right track.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is a fountain of wisdom. I would point out that I think Canada's participation in this mission got sidetracked largely because this peacekeeping mission transformed into something else. We originally went to Afghanistan as part of a peacekeeping mission.

In my humble opinion, what got us sidetracked was that some military and non-military people took advantage of this opportunity in Kandahar to transform our army from an army of wimps—as I heard them called once—into an army of real soldiers.

Since there was a shortage of equipment, it also became an opportunity to purchase military equipment. Before thinking things through, as we should have done the second we headed off to Kandahar, some people had very different interests, which will leave

a long-term mark on the Canada's armed forces and on Canada's international involvement.

• (1515)

[English]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have quite an extraordinary motion before the House today on an opposition day. We need to think about this for a moment. The official opposition has decided to use the opportunity of an opposition day to bring the government to a realization of the full impact of what it agreed to do more than a month ago.

A month ago the government agreed to accept the official opposition's suggestion of compromise and direction with a view to providing purpose to our position in Afghanistan. It is a position that has consumed the public attention for five and more years now but most particularly in this year, after we have seen the fatalities mount to 82 of our soldiers and after everyone is seized with the idea of ensuring that any Canadian participation value the lives of those men and women who offered themselves up for the purpose of ensuring that all those values that are Canadian be recognized, implemented and valued everywhere around the world. That is what has been at the basis of our debate and what has been on the foundation stones of all of our positions on what Canada will do, militarily or otherwise, in Afghanistan.

As we know, the government, using language that mothers might have thought differently, decided to extend the mission and ask for parliamentary approval. The government did that in 2006. What it really meant was that it wanted to turn the mission from one that it primarily was intended to be, a reconstruction and development mission, into one where there would be war fighting, and there were justifications. I am not here to revisit the history of that debate but suffice it to say that next year the mandate would have to be to either renew or abandon.

The government, to its credit, said that there would be a debate in the House of Commons and that debate did take place. The official opposition, as well as the other opposition parties, pointed out all of the requirements that needed to be satisfied in order to at least give the Canadian public a sense that it was participating in a real debate on the merits of being part of the Afghan mission.

We compromised a great deal. From a personal point of view, I gave a position that said no, but parties collectively came forward and, with the collective wisdom of their caucuses, they arrived at a position that was worthy of statesmanship for the country.

What did my party, the official opposition, do? It presented a motion that, happily, was absorbed, adopted and implemented by the government almost in its entirety. It said, and this is not usual in a parliamentary environment, that it preferred the official opposition's approach to our presence in Afghanistan and that it would present that position as its own in the House of Commons for all the parties to either accept or reject.

The result was that the official opposition accepted. However, the mainstay of that motion included a commitment by the government and this House that there would be the establishment of a committee of parliamentarians that would provide the oversight, an omission that has caused such great concern in the country.

Business of supply

• (1520)

All parliamentarians in the House agreed that the government would establish an all party committee that would provide oversight and cooperation with the three line departments most immediately implicated in the Canadian experience in Afghanistan, specifically the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his department, the Minister of National Defence and his department, and the Minister of International Cooperation, CIDA.

Here we are a month later, decisions being made on Afghanistan, our role in the world being debated in Bucharest and elsewhere, our commitment to international development and reconstruction on-going and our contribution militarily still being determined on an ad hoc basis and no committee.

One might take exception to the composition of a committee that would fall out of the normal practices of Parliament but one cannot take lightly the idea that the House, the government, the opposition would agree to a motion, asked for by the government itself, to create a committee that would provide the coordination, the oversight and one that would review the laws and procedures governing the use of operational and national security exceptions for the withholding of information from Parliament, the courts and the Canadian people, with those responsible for administering those laws and procedures, and to ensure that Canadians are being provided with ample information on the conduct and the progress of the mission.

We should be outraged that the government has yet to move in the direction of implementing such a committee. Today's motion is there to offer the government an opportunity to do what it had committed to do on the floor of the House and with the support of opposition parties.

It was not something that was done willy-nilly. Mr. Speaker, I notice that you are listening very attentively to the reasons why we came to that position.

The government claimed that it needed to get the public on side on Afghanistan and our mission therein, so it commissioned a panel of experts. That panel suggested, among several other things, first, that we ensure the world recognizes our input and that it come forward with an additional 1,000 troops, otherwise we would not continue our mission. One thousand troops, a 40% increase in the number of troops that we have deployed in Afghanistan and specifically in Kandahar province.

The government accepted that recommendation and said that this was its line in the sand. If we cannot get the rest of the world to accept our contribution and recognize its value, then we shall opt out. That was part of the debate.

The Prime Minister and his ministers lauded left and right everywhere around the country the fact that a panel of experts said that we would make our mission contingent upon the contribution of an additional 1,000 troops.

It appears that we finally have them. I do not know whether that will solve all the problems but it is not for me to judge, at least not today. I am skeptical but the government said that was one of the conditions and, in accepting the motion, it also said that it would

allow itself to be monitored by this parliamentary committee so that the achievements, the objectives and the goals that would be aimed at with this additional group that would buttress the Canadian presence militarily, that would always be present in the House, and that the Canadian public, through its elected representatives in situ and always in conjunction with those three line departments, would have an up to date view of the progress of the mission that very few in Canada applaud wholeheartedly.

• (1525)

They are not anti-military. They are not anti-troops. They are for the achievement of objectives that are clearly stated, clearly outlined and systematically put in place.

The second objective the government said had to be met in order for us to continue the extension of the mission was the achievement of greater operational lift, and that is helicopters to move our troops from point A to point B. It appears we have moved in some direction toward achieving that objective and to satisfying that condition. However, we still do not have an oversight committee of Parliament to ensure that be done, just as we cannot be sure it will achieve the other condition of securing the appropriate armoured vehicles to transport our troops in safety from point A to point B.

I have spoken only for a brief moment on the military component of the mission. It is a military component that very tragically has resulted, at least for Canada, in the highest rate of fatality of all countries, specifically of countries that continue to make a military contribution exceeding 2,000 armed personnel. The fatality rate is 3%. The other countries combined have 1.4%. Even the United States with all of its troops has a fatality rate of 1.7%.

What concerned us was the safety of our troops. We are putting them in the line of fire in a dangerous environment. We wanted to ensure that, at the very least, we could provide them with the technology they required in order to achieve an objective and also the technology necessary to provide them security in a dangerous environment. It has not happened. We are not sure. We do not have the parliamentary committee that the government promised on accepting that motion. It seems perhaps that it is unprepared to move in tandem with the goodwill of the House to achieve national objectives.

The other thing that concerned us was the presence of Canada in the greater Middle East. It is a part of the world so far away from Canada that it barely achieves the attention of those who hold Canadian values dear. The government, through the expert panel, pointed out that to date we had collectively spent, as citizens of this country, in excess of \$6 billion through our military presence. Some people would say it would be money better spent if we wanted to change the world.

This is only our contribution and that amount of money increases on a yearly basis. In fact, there is an estimate, and I suspect it came from the government because it came through the usual unnamed sources for military writers, that by the time we end up in 2012, we will have spent about \$18 billion in Afghanistan. Some might say that is a fantastic amount of money just for one country. That money is well worth it if it achieves the objective we have laid out for ourselves. It is an absolute waste if it achieves nothing.

Business of supply

To give some idea of how fabulous that amount of money would be, it is only \$2 billion less than the entire GDP of Afghanistan. This is an enormous amount of money for one country to contribute militarily, for security purposes.

• (1530)

We are not there as a conquering nation. We are there, as the government has said, to provide security for our other approach. Our other approach is one of development. Unfortunately, according to the government, we have spent to date only \$600 million on development aid and reconstruction. We are spending something like \$12 on military and defence initiatives for Afghanistan for every \$1 we spend in development aid. Yet I am sure all members on the government side would say that if we could achieve our objectives through development aid and reconstruction, then those dollars would be very well spent.

Members on this side agree we would spend more. Six hundred million dollars does not appear to be a fabulous sum when the objectives are as noble as those that we outlined for ourselves in Afghanistan. We wanted this committee to ensure those funds would achieve the objectives that we outlined for ourselves. Because 50¢ out of every one of those dollars, that is \$300 million, goes to UN agencies. We do not spend it there. Another 35¢ out of every dollar goes directly to Afghan national institutions to ensure they begin to develop the culture of government servicing the people. Only 15¢ per dollar of contribution is left.

We on this side of the House asked for a committee to ensure there would be adequate coordination between our defence objectives and our development objectives, and that committee is not here yet. The government has perhaps thought that now the debate has spent its force, we do not need to look at what it should do. All we want to happen is for the government to respect the will of Parliament and ensure that this committee be in place, so all of those defence and development reconstruction efforts are coordinated, not just where Canada sits, but perhaps as well, according to the independent panel, that other countries move in a coordinated effort to transform a society that generates a lot of the concerns that have caused the fear and paranoia worldwide. Whether it has been justified is another story, but that is the basis for this.

The third reason why we wanted this committee, the third rationale, which was buttressed as well by that independent panel, was there had to be greater diplomatic efforts. Foreign affairs needed to be much more engaged in what was going on in Afghanistan, where our allies, and there are many, were operating on their own agenda. For example, there is a country adjacent to Afghanistan, a country whose cooperation is absolutely crucial for the success, however limited or however superior to any nation or combination of nations in Afghanistan, and that would be Pakistan.

Ten of the provinces in Afghanistan border Pakistan. There are twice as many Taliban operating in some of the border provinces of Afghanistan than there are operating in the rest of Afghanistan. A lot of the activities that we know are there are dependent on the cooperation that we get from Pakistan. Seventy per cent of our material and human resources go into Afghanistan through Pakistan.

It makes sense for a coordinated effort on the part of Canada of those three departments. All we asked for on this side of the House

was cooperation by the government in instituting an all party committee, which it would chair, to ensure the coordination of all these issues and departments would reflect the intention of Canadians, as expressed through their members of Parliament in the House, and moved and accepted by the government.

All we want, through this motion today, is the transparency and the openness that the government opposite offered all members of Parliament a month ago when we gave it the okay to continue in Afghanistan.

• (1535)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened quite intently to the hon. member's remarks. He put a lot of passion into them and I am sure he puts a lot of passion into the issue.

To keep the record straight, since this government came into power, it has taken steps to ensure there has been full debate in the House of Commons about our mission in Afghanistan. The government brought in a panel, headed by the former Liberal deputy prime minister. The member was in the House when the panel's report and recommendations were presented. The foreign affairs committee has studied the whole issue over the last six months. Perhaps the member should have asked his fellow Liberal members about what was happening at the committee.

When the motion to extend the mission was brought forward in the House, we had two days of debate. The Liberal members were absent from the debate as soon as the clock hit 9 p.m. at night. If they were so passionate about this, they would have stayed and debated.

However, after saying all those things, we need to look ahead and move forward. The House passed the Canadian motion, a cooperative effort between both sides of the House. Part of the motion called for an additional 1,000 troops. It was important for the Prime Minister to ensure that the resources would be available, as was the will of the Parliament.

Once that has been done, we move on to the next stage, which is the committee about which he has talked. We must not forget the fact that during all this time the foreign affairs committee has been studying this.

We stated from the outset that we agreed with the motion because it was the will of Parliament. I do not see why he would keep complaining and talking about it. I would rather he talk about what we are to do in the future, now that Canada is in Afghanistan until 2011, to ensure the efforts and sacrifices of the Canadian soldiers, including the money invested in the war, do not go unnoticed. I recommend he look ahead rather than look back in the past and complain.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I deliberately moved away from ad hominem attacks or snide comments regarding political partisanship and organization. Why? Not because I am unable to do that, but because I think this is a topic and an issue that requires the appropriate gravitas from anyone who engages in it.

Business of supply

The issues, as I might remind the member opposite, are twofold. First, as I said, is the question of completing a commitment made in a motion that was accepted by the House, and it has not happened yet. We are asking for it to be done. Second, is to remind all people of the substance of the issue itself, without having taken a position. That position has already been determined by the House.

What we have done is present a motion that asks the government to recognize all the serious elements associated with the Canadian position in Afghanistan. If the member opposite would like me to review them for him, I shall be pleased to do so.

I caution that this is a serious topic. The only responsibility that members here ought to take is whether they will comply with the will of Parliament, which was expressed in a non-partisan fashion and, as both the Prime Minister and the leader of the official opposition said, in a truly Canadian statesman like fashion. It is a Canadian position that needs to be committed to and fulfilled as per Parliament's request a month ago. We cannot wait much longer.

• (1540)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, and I am looking forward to his speech.

The question being asked is, why is Canada committed to continuing its mission in Afghanistan? Our mission in Afghanistan is a clear example of Canadian values in action. Our own experience in nation building, which serves as a model around the world, was sought out for Afghanistan.

Through our direct military engagement, diplomatic support and development assistance, Canada is committed to continuing to make a difference in the lives of men, women and children in Afghanistan. Just a few years ago, Afghan women and girls were unable to safely walk the streets of their own country, and were not allowed to go to school or to work.

Now, because of the intervention of the international community, Afghan children are going to school, to work, to the marketplaces and dreaming of a better life for their families. This is in sharp contrast to the Taliban, which can only promise more death and destruction. As Afghanistan emerges from its troubled past, Canada must continue to provide the support needed to finish the job.

At the centre of the Canadian mission is Kandahar province. We recognize that as the former seat of Taliban power and the heart of the insurgent presence in Afghanistan, Kandahar province is the keystone to the overall success of Afghanistan's transition. For exactly this reason, Canada has its troops in Kandahar. We understand that it is the province most in need of international support. Bringing together the best of what Canada can offer, we are making a meaningful contribution to international reconstruction and stabilization efforts there.

We should not underestimate just how much our participation is contributing to Canada's stand in the international community. There is a universal appreciation for the real threat posed by an unstable Afghanistan. Countries have taken notice of Canada's willingness to roll up its sleeves and get the job done.

Canada's continued leadership role will ensure the success of the mandate that the United Nations conferred on NATO, but Canada will not be intimidated. Our mission is clear and this government remains committed to seeing it through. We are making significant progress in implementing the motion adopted by the House. By focusing on our traditional strengths as a nation, we are helping to build the governance systems and institutions necessary so that we will be able to leave Afghanistan to the Afghan people.

One of the critical ways Canada will continue to achieve success in Afghanistan is through our provincial reconstruction team, PRT, in Kandahar province. This effort brings together 350 people, elements from the Canadian Forces, Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Correctional Service Canada in a whole of government approach.

The PRT promotes the development of a stable and secure environment, helping build governance capacity and enabling security sector reform and reconstruction efforts to take place. Canada is not alone in establishing a PRT. Twenty-six provincial reconstruction teams have been established and supported by many countries throughout Afghanistan as part of larger concerted international efforts in Afghanistan.

By using non-military assets to address the causes of instability, PRTs are helping the government of Afghanistan extend its authority throughout the country. By maintaining a long term, sustained approach to our mission, there will be a progressive expansion of Afghan civilian capacities and a gradual transfer of roles and responsibilities to Afghan nationals, ultimately creating the conditions where a Canadian presence is no longer required.

Over the next years, it will be crucial to continue building on the leadership role we have played since assuming command of the Kandahar PRT in August 2005. The role and purpose of the PRT is to assist elected Afghan authorities in providing governance and security, as well as delivering basic services to its citizens.

By doing so, by helping the Afghan government extend its authority across the country, PRTs help create the environment in which reconstruction and development efforts can take place. This is entirely consistent with our values and our expertise. It is also a practical expression of a whole of government approach to achieving Canadian foreign policy objectives.

• (1545)

How do the different elements of the PRT set about achieving this? On the military side, security is the primary role. Because Canada is engaged in operations in a dangerous environment, the military is responsible for providing an enabling environment for the civilian elements of the PRT to allow them to pursue their development and reconstruction work.

Another element is our civilian police officers who have been deployed to the PRT to assist in building the capacity of the local Afghan police by establishing relationships, implementing training programs, and serving as the point of contact between the Afghan police and the PRT.

Business of supply

The role of reconstruction and development workers at the PRT is to implement programs that build the capacity of the government, create confidence in that government, and ultimately establish the conditions for long term development to succeed.

Diplomats are responsible for advocacy, influence, analysis and advice to help the Afghan government enhance its reach and legitimacy in Kandahar province. By working closely with local structures like the governor's office and the police, our diplomats are supporting security and governance reform.

Through advice, training and mentoring we are also working to support the development of sound judicial and corrections systems as called for by the motion adopted by this House.

The work being accomplished by the PRT in Kandahar alongside our international partners is leading to real results. With our help, Afghans have completed over 690 community development and infrastructure projects in Kandahar province alone during the past five years. This includes, for instance, over 1,200 wells and over 150 kilometres of irrigation canals that have been built or restored in Kandahar since 2003. Also, thanks to Canada's help, the highway between Kandahar and Spin Boldak, a key artery, is being rebuilt and paved.

We are staying on course.

Canadians should not be under any illusions. Our mission in Kandahar is complex, challenging and very dangerous. Our reconstruction work in Afghanistan is far from over. It takes years for nation building efforts to take root, and we must be prepared to stand up and make that commitment clear.

We must take pride in knowing that our civilian police will be working to ensure that Afghan police are patrolling the streets of Kandahar better trained and better equipped. We must take pride in knowing that the Canadian government will continue to provide expertise to ensure the Afghan government provides better service to its local population. We must take pride in knowing that Canadian efforts will help Afghan farmers turn their backs on the drug trade and learn new skills.

The road ahead will be fraught with many challenges, but Canada must make its commitment to Afghanistan very clear.

Much has been accomplished in Afghanistan over the past six years. With our help and support, the Afghan government is establishing the institutions that are needed for a vigorous democracy to take root. Afghans themselves are learning the skills they need to build roads and provide basic services, and they are building up their security forces so one day the democratically elected government of Afghanistan will be able to defend its sovereignty and keep the Taliban at bay.

These are accomplishments in which Canadians should take tremendous pride. Every day we see the difference we are making as Canadian soldiers and civilians work with Afghans to help them build a better society.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about Oshawa's own Ontario regiment. We have had a number of volunteers go over to Afghanistan and they have told me personally about the wonderful things that they have seen. Standing here as their member of

Parliament I could not be more proud of the brave men who have gone over to help expand Canadian values around the world.

As a Canadian, as a parliamentarian, I am so proud of our men and women who take up the role of not only defending our country, but moving out into the world to expand the knowledge of Canadian values. Where there is evil and corruption, where women's rights are being ignored and children's rights are being ignored, it is our Canadian soldiers who are taking a leading role in making a change in the world.

In closing, I want to thank the House for the opportunity to take part in this debate today. I want to thank the Liberal Party for bringing forth this motion and using one of its opposition days to support the government motion. I am looking forward to getting things done for the people of Afghanistan. I want to thank the people who sign up for the Canadian Forces to allow that to happen.

• (1550)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his uplifting and insightful speech that outlined the wonderful things that Canada has contributed to Afghanistan.

A few weeks ago women members of Afghanistan's parliament came to Canada to share what it was like to be a member of parliament in Afghanistan and to share their delight for Canada's participation in Afghanistan.

Would the member take a few moments to outline some of their comments? Perhaps he could indicate why they felt it was so important that Canada continue to be in Afghanistan to help do all the things that the member outlined in his speech a few moments ago.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, those women who came to Ottawa are my heroes.

I am standing here today as a parliamentarian in this wonderful House. We may get caught up in a few partisan battles, but they are nothing compared to the battles that those women face day in and day out. They are in a situation now where their lives are threatened. They look at the situation where in their own society under the Taliban, women were forced to stay at home unable to earn money for their families.

Canada is the number one supporter of the microfinance investment support facility which has enabled women, because mostly women take up these start up businesses, to become a successful part of their community, providing food and shelter for their children. It just melted my heart when I heard that. My understanding is that women are the major uptakers of this program.

Under the brutal Taliban regime, women had no voice in public life. Imagine a world where a woman was unable to stand up and give her opinions, unable to run for public office, unable to own property. This is the regime that they faced under the Taliban.

Business of supply

When these very brave parliamentarians made the trek here to Ottawa it really put into perspective why we are all here and why it is so vital and important that we as Canadian parliamentarians stand up and support our brave men and women who are over there right now, making a difference in women's lives, the rights of women and the rights of children.

I want to thank my colleague for that wonderful question and to let everyone in Canada know that these women are getting the job done for their constituents. I am very proud that Canada has a major part to play in that transformation.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just now a report has come out on the BBC that militants have killed 17 Afghan workers. When we stand here and talk about development, there were 17 workers who were building Afghanistan and militants killed them. That is the kind of challenge being faced. That is why we want security there.

Perhaps the member could comment on this. When we talk about development, we cannot forget the security component, as this story has just indicated.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his hard work in this very important international commitment that Canada has brought forward. He brings home a very important point.

He is talking about development. The truth is for construction and development to occur, we need defence. We have heard calls from some factions that Canada should withdraw all its military troops from Afghanistan. This would be a tragedy.

I personally have had Afghans in my own community of Oshawa come forward and say to me, "God bless you. Please stay. Please continue your good job in Afghanistan". They know the difference that we are making there.

To make that difference, our community workers and the community workers that we are training, that we are putting out there for the Afghan people, need to be protected.

I thank the parliamentary secretary for that very important question so I could make that distinction.

• (1555)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to speak before the House today to this important matter.

There are many reasons why Canada is in Afghanistan but they all come down to the same basic principle: we are there to help a people and a country in need. We are there because Canadians care about helping those affected by turmoil and upheaval. We are there because we can and must make a difference.

Canada is in Afghanistan under a UN mandate and at the invitation of a democratically elected Afghan government. We are part of a community of more than 60 nations and organizations that have united to help the Afghan government rebuild the country and restore freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law, values that we cherish in our own country but that have been denied to the people of Afghanistan for far too long.

Canada's mission in Afghanistan is one of partnership. We are working closely, not only with the government of Afghanistan, but also with other allied nations and with trusted non-government partners. Partnership is the only viable strategy for bringing lasting peace and development to this troubled nation.

One aspect of this partnership is military. Canadian soldiers are doing absolutely critical work to bring stability to a country that has been torn apart by internal strife for decades. They are helping to create secure conditions in which development and reconstruction can flourish.

However, it is the development side of the mission that I would like to focus on today and, more particularly, the work of our dedicated partners on the ground, partners who have invested heavily in the future of Afghanistan and whose work is literally transforming lives. These partners include UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme, to name just a few. They are among the most highly experienced, most trusted and most accountable organizations in the world. They have proven records of delivering tangible results on the ground.

In 2007, for example, Canada's contribution to the World Food Programme helped feed more than 550,000 hungry people in the province of Kandahar alone. This aid targets those who are most vulnerable, including families displaced by conflict or affected by drought.

In addition to providing much needed emergency food assistance to the vulnerable, the World Food Programme also delivers aid through the food for work and food for education projects, helping individuals build essential skills and rehabilitate their community's infrastructure.

Last year, Canadian funds supported the construction or rehabilitation of more than 3,000 kilometres of canals and more than 250 kilometres of roads in Kandahar through the food for work initiatives.

In addition, more than 30,000 people in the province benefited from functional literacy training and more than 4,000 people received vocational skills training through the food for education initiative.

Canada's support for organizations working in the area of health also deserves special recognition. For example, our contributions to UNICEF have supported the delivery of a large scale measles and tetanus vaccination campaign in Kandahar. This program has reached more than 200,000 children and more than 175,000 women of childbearing age.

Also, as part of this project, UNICEF is providing essential non-food items, such as blankets and sweaters, to thousands of vulnerable families. Medical and nutritional supplies, including emergency health kits, are also being provided to those in need.

Canada is also a strong supporter of the World Health Organization's polio eradication efforts. Our contribution is helping to immunize more than 7 million children against polio, including approximately 350,000 children in Kandahar province.

Business of supply

Health and food aid are important aspects of our work in Afghanistan but we are also helping to rebuild institutions of government.

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

Canada's governance programs help ensure that laws are both just and arrived at democratically. We support independent, effective institutions that enforce those laws so that everyone can feel safe in their communities and homes. For example, with support from Canada, the International Development Law Organization has trained more than 70 prosecutors in financial and juvenile crime and more than 200 judges have been trained in civil, criminal and commercial law and procedure.

Also thanks to financial aid from Canada, Rights & Democracy has opened women's centres throughout Afghanistan, providing women with basic services, such as legal aid, and giving them a refuge in a place where they can feel safe and supported.

• (1600)

We are also supporting initiatives to strengthen human rights, including the deployment of a gender adviser to the minister of interior and support to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which promotes human rights and investigates violations with an emphasis on women and children.

My goal in coming here today was to underscore just how big a difference our contributions are making in Afghanistan, and this progress is all being achieved against long odds. Not only are we working in one of the most volatile and difficult environments in the world, we are also almost starting from scratch.

Emerging in 2001 from decades of violence and conflict, there is almost nothing left in Afghanistan. The country's infrastructure was grazed to the ground. Its landscape was contaminated by mines. Its people lived in abject poverty and the basic services, such as health care and education, were virtually non-existent. However, despite these challenges, real progress is being made.

Day to day, community by community, Afghans are laying the foundations for a brighter future. This speaks both to their fortitude and their resilience as people and to the sustained support and commitment of the international community.

I look forward to continuing to be part of these important discussions as we continue to support the people of Afghanistan in the years ahead.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very insightful speech about all the things that are happening around Afghanistan, but having said that, I would like my colleague to comment on the important role that our brave men and women in the Canadian Forces play.

In his speech, he spoke of all the advances and how women were now able to be a part of society. He spoke of the many wonderful things that are happening in Afghanistan but if it were not for our dedicated, brave and courageous military men and women, this would not be happening. Could my colleague just comment on that?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. I know I touched on a lot of the health issues and the reconstruction issues but none of this could be done without the security provided by our brave men and women in uniform.

We think of how hard it is to even institute some of these programs in a country as resource rich as Canada and in an environment as easy as the one in Canada, but to go to a country that is starting from scratch, where roads and bridges did not exist and where no infrastructure was left and having to rebuild from there is hard enough, but it is even harder when it has to be done under the fire of the Taliban and under the security situations that are there.

I have had the opportunity to speak to young men and women from the 31st Combat Engineers Regiment from my own riding in the Elgins. The engineers in this case are helping to rebuild parts of Afghanistan but they are also spending a great deal of time removing landmines. Imagine sending our kids out to play and not knowing where or what type of landmines there might be. Afghanistan is inundated with landmines and that is one of the other important jobs we do.

People ask why our forces there. They are there because security needs to be there so we can go about doing the good jobs for health, for rebuilding the economy and for putting kids back in school.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

I am pleased to speak today to the motion of my colleague, the Liberal foreign affairs critic.

The purpose of this motion is to improve the motion adopted by Parliament on March 13, 2008. In seeking to create this special parliamentary committee, an idea already approved by the majority of members, including government members, we are acting in accordance with what has already been expressed as the will of Parliament.

What will be the purpose of this special committee? It will be a parliamentary committee to monitor—let me emphasize the word “monitor”—the current Canadian mission in Afghanistan. This special committee could keep Parliament better informed on the progress and setbacks of the mission, while ensuring that the government is as transparent and accountable as possible to the Canadian public.

This monitoring committee could have different facets, but in no way would it be involved in military operations. It would monitor the progress in the field until February 2009 with the unequivocal purpose of preparing for the post-2009 period, as expressed in the March 13 motion, in other words, changing the current combat mission into a reconstruction mission.

Business of supply

The Liberal Party has committed to post-February 2009, because of the essential, non-negotiable conditions to that end, including an additional 1,000 troops sent by another country, access to drones, and, in particular, making our presence in Afghanistan a reconstruction mission with the express goal of helping the Afghan people. The objective of current development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan is to help build a stable, democratic and prosperous country that contributes to regional and global security. Guided by the Afghanistan millennium development goals, the Afghanistan interim national development strategy and the Afghanistan compact, the Afghan government is working with international partners to address the country's immediate and long-term needs in areas as diverse as health, education, governance, policing, agriculture and infrastructure rehabilitation.

This committee should, as is done by all the other countries in Afghanistan, obtain clear and precise answers on various points and different aspects of what is currently being done and what will be done after February 2009.

Reconstruction is one aspect, if not the most important aspect. What does this word mean to the government? What does this word mean to CIDA? Who are these PRTs, the provincial reconstruction teams?

Operating in 25 provinces, PRTs are hosted and assembled by individual countries, including Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. They comprise military units, civilian political advisors and development advisors working in an integrated fashion to provide humanitarian assistance and to support development activities.

The priorities and configuration of each PRT are set out by the host country to reflect the conditions and needs in the particular province, but the overriding objective is to contribute to the stability, security and outreach of the central government's authority and to support local and provincial administrations. The primary mechanisms for achieving these objectives are regular interaction with the local authorities and the population, visibility, information-gathering with regard to security and stability, and support for the Afghan National Police. It is also important to note that, despite the internal integration of PRTs, their military components are part of NATO's International Security Assistance Force efforts.

But what will Canada do? Will Canada provide training for new reconstruction teams in Kandahar province?

How do we move forward? We must not ignore the fact that in Kandahar province, there are practically no reconstruction projects to speak of and, I dare say, this is primarily because of the flagrant lack of security for workers.

There are other factors. Are we talking about the reconstruction of roads, schools, clinics, access to water, irrigation? Who will our partners be? NGOs? Local communities?

We must decide and above all we must plan what we intend to do. Regarding NGOs, it seems that the Conservative government is allergic to the very idea of NGOs, an expression it has banished within the government, although NGOs are the very embodiment of Canadian civil society, that is, the multitudes of citizens who are interested, informed and engaged in ensuring that our country

becomes more and more capable of assuming its global responsibilities.

Such scorn for the opinion of Canadian civil society, or, we might say, such deliberate disregard of the wishes of Canadians is quickly becoming the trademark of this government.

In fact, the report specifically called on the government to develop more frank reporting to Canadians. It is also a fact, however, that the culture of secrecy imposed and perpetuated by the Conservative government only shows that we are still a far cry from having a government that takes its responsibility seriously to be open and honest with Canadians.

• (1610)

This is not the Conservative government's mission. It is first and foremost Canada's mission and consequently emanates from all Canadians.

Does the reconstruction effort have an agricultural component? Without agriculture or markets for their crops, the local population cannot meet its basic needs. Hence, the clan leaders must turn to poppy crops with all the ensuing consequences.

What progress, if any, has been made in discussions with the Kabul authorities and also, more importantly, with Kandahar authorities? The committee will have to obtain answers to all these questions.

The mission in Afghanistan is definitely very important; however, as with any large mission involving armed forces, it will only be resolved by negotiations that engage not only Afghanistan, but also neighbouring countries, Pakistan and Iran in particular, and especially with the total involvement of the UN and the Security Council.

Canada, with its internationally recognized history of diplomacy, could play a leading role. In order to do that, the government must agree and be prepared to invest the requisite time and money.

In Canada, we have exceptional career diplomats and diplomats well-versed in conducting negotiations. For these reasons, among others, I am asking this House to vote in favour of this motion. The government should finally take appropriate action: that is what we are demanding, that is what Canadians are demanding.

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is a member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, with me, and he has been quite an active member. Together we have been doing a very extensive study on the situation in Afghanistan. I hope that he gets elected as the vice-chair of the committee and that we will continue working together on that committee, collectively, as we have done in the past, and that we will address issues that are important to Canada.

Business of supply

I have a question for the hon. member. As he knows, we all agree about this committee. However, I think we must also look at the work we have done in the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, for which a report is about to be prepared. He and I will work together to ensure that this new committee does not duplicate the work of that committee and that the work of that committee and all the witnesses we have heard before that committee are taken into account by this new committee.

I hope the hon. member can then tell his foreign affairs critic about all the efforts and all these things, because this morning when I was asking his foreign affairs critic a question I found a lack of knowledge on his part, and I can understand that because he is a new member.

My friend on the other side has been there for a very long time, so hopefully he will be able to tell his colleague this, and we can work together on that.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, for his wishes, but before coming into the House I was elected vice-chair. I just wanted to let him know. I am very proud about it and very happy.

However, regarding the hon. member's question, I must say that the committee always has worked on consensus. We have worked on consensus before and have done a report on the issue of Afghanistan. I do not think the new committee will be a duplication of the current committee. I think this committee needs to do a follow-up on what is going on right now just to assure Canadians that we know exactly what to do.

Regarding the PRTs, I think they are very important. Right now in the committee we are studying mainly defence stuff to see where we are going with our armed forces, but we also want to study the reconstruction. As I stated in my speech, reconstruction also means agriculture, not just the water supply. It is all these things, because the worst thing that could happen is that if we do not win the hearts of the Afghan people, we will lose the war.

Also very important is Canada's involvement in diplomacy. We need to be with the United Nations and the Security Council, which are very much present over there, because any war will be solved not by arms but by diplomacy.

• (1615)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity today to discuss this important motion that is before the House. The mission in Afghanistan is of extreme importance to Canadians. It has caused a lot of discussion, some dissension and spirited public debate from coast to coast. The House passed a motion a month ago that was supported by the government and by the official opposition, but the motion thus far has not been enacted.

I want to talk a little from a personal point of view as a member of Parliament from a community that has a large military population, that has a lot of veterans and that takes service very seriously.

I supported Canada's purpose in entering Afghanistan some six years ago. This is a NATO-led mission under the express authority of

the United Nations at the invitation of the Afghan government. Our role, however, has evolved over the last six years. I would not be truthful if I did not say that it has caused me some concern over that period of time.

One of my own personal passions is Canada's place in the world, in Afghanistan certainly, but more particularly for me in international development and development assistance, and Canada's role in assisting the poorest of the poor. I have had a concern that Canada's international development assistance program has been largely gobbled up and dedicated to Afghanistan, possibly to the detriment of other places in the world. That causes me concern. There are a lot of places where Canada should play a role in the world, Darfur being a prime example, but there are others as well.

However, I also have heard from those who have been to Afghanistan, those who have served, those who have been there and those who understand the situation there, and they tell me that there are significant improvements in the way of life of the Afghan people.

As I say, I come from a military area and I have in my riding many serving members of the Canadian Forces and many veterans. The highlights of my constituency work include a lot of military events: the Battle of the Atlantic, the Battle of Britain, D-Day and Remembrance Day. These are all very important. When one lives in the community of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, as I do, one is constantly reminded of the sacrifice of those who have served and of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

For me, the mission hit home in a very profound way on March 2, 2006. On that day I flew home from Ottawa. When I arrived in Halifax along with other members of Parliament and turned on my BlackBerry, it was buzzing with the news of the death of Corporal Paul Davis, 2nd Battalion, Prince Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, one of the first deaths in Afghanistan.

It struck home for many of us because we knew his family. Jim Davis, his father, is a very good friend of mine. On the way in from the airport that day, I called Jim and expressed my condolences on the loss of his son. He was obviously distraught, but people who saw him that day and as he was interviewed on the news that night were struck by a number of things, most particularly by his belief that his son had died for a good cause and that before he had served overseas they had in fact talked about that.

On that same day, Master Corporal Timothy Wilson from Grande Prairie, Alberta was killed, and a number of Canadians were wounded. It was one of the first times that we had to deal with that as a nation: the shocking news that we had lost a serving member of the Canadian Forces.

Two months later, we had the vote in the House in May 2006. After some consideration, I supported the extension of the mission, and I believe still that it was the right thing to do. Over the past couple of years our troops have continued their work and the country has continued to debate the progress of the mission.

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In January, the Manley panel issued its report and made a number of recommendations. Whether one agrees with the conclusions or not, I think Canadians should read this report. I think it lays out well not only its recommendations but how it comes to those conclusions, along with the history of the mission in Afghanistan and the reasons for being there. I think in some ways it has very frank recommendations for what should be done.

One of the things that struck me when I read it early on, because I think it is something that we need to be reminded about, is what the report states on page 8: "Informed and fair-minded Canadians can differ on the policy choices before us".

One thing that has irritated me is the expressed belief by some members and by some Canadians in regard to those who have not supported the extension of the mission. I did support it, but I have friends in a number of political parties who did not. It offends me when they are referred to as friends of the Taliban or when they are told that they care more about the Taliban than they do about Canadian servicemen and servicewomen. That is not right. That allusion in the report to the fact that we can disagree and differ on these choices is I think very important.

• (1620)

The report makes a number of recommendations. It talks about the 1,000 more troops, the medium lift helicopters and the high performance UAVs. It also makes some other recommendations. On page 20, it states:

Important issues of Canadian diplomacy and aid in Afghanistan have scarcely been acknowledged and seldom asserted in public by ministers or officials responsible. Canada's ambassadors in Kabul, NATO and other capitals have had limited authority to explain Canadian policy. The Panel believes that this information deficit needs to be redressed immediately in a comprehensive and more balanced communication strategy of open and continuous engagement with Canadians.

It also talks about the necessity of moving to reconstruction and development to better assess our progress. If we are going to have people serving overseas, we need to have very strict benchmarks and metrics for measuring how we are doing, as well as the franker reporting.

On February 8, the government tabled its motion on Afghanistan. The tabling of the motion itself in some ways did not follow a recommendation on page 34 of the Manley report, which states, "Parliament might wish to defer judgment on Canada's future in Afghanistan until the NATO summit", which is the one in April, "is concluded".

Nonetheless, it came before the House and we had a discussion here. People will recall the debate that happened and the amendment that was put forward by the Liberals, which bought the support of both the government and the official opposition. I continue to believe to this day that this motion, as amended, is something that sits very comfortably both in my head and in my heart as we try to deal with what is the right thing to do in Afghanistan and what Canada's role is supposed to be.

I think we need to improve communications with Canadians. We have heard that not just from the report of the Manley commission but from Canadians, who want to be informed about what is happening in the mission. That is not to say that there are not some occurrences or instances where they cannot, but I think we all

understand that happens. However, as a matter of policy, as often as possible we need to communicate that and we need to have that debate also take place in the Parliament of Canada.

Decisions have to be made by the government, and we all accept that, but the discussion has to take place in Parliament. The motion that was put forward and passed by the House called for improved communication with Canadians, or in other words shedding more light on this mission, and for setting dates for our move to reconstruction and redevelopment.

There is a lot of work that should be done in Afghanistan. There is a lot of poverty, gender inequity and even issues of environment that could be dealt with in a more effective way. We need to make the transition to that work and then we need to exit. Tonight we vote again on a motion very similar to the last one that was passed by the House.

The mission in Afghanistan has consumed an awful lot of public debate. It has caused some good discussion to happen in this country and I suspect that it has caused some bad discussion to happen in this country, but that is the fact of life with most issues we deal with.

We should pass this motion tonight. I urge other parties to support it. Let us move on with this special committee and get the work done. Let us shed some light on what is happening in Afghanistan. Let us really understand how we are going to make this critical transition in 2009 and then how we are going to get out of Afghanistan and leave it a better place.

I do not believe that the solution in Afghanistan will be a military solution any more than it is in most places in a modern age. The solutions come from the people in these countries and there has to be political support. That can be enabled and helped by development. There needs to be military support for it, but we have to allow for a political solution in Afghanistan.

Let us move forward with respect for our troops and respect for each other as parliamentarians and Canadians, recognizing that nobody has a patent on patriotism. We all want to do the right thing for the Afghan people. Let us get on with it.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest, as always, to my colleague's dissertation in the House. I was very struck by how he spoke of the need for us to engage in a debate where we are not using cheap rhetoric toward each other.

I think by far the most important decision that any member of Parliament makes is the decision of whether or not to put someone else's life in danger. That is a decision each member in this House must make in good conscience, and they do make it in good conscience based on what they feel at the end of the day is in the best interests of the country and the people they represent.

That is a task we cannot give to anyone else. It is our task alone, it is why we are here, and I certainly appreciate his plea to make this debate about that.

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I have listened to the debate today and I would say that everyone is trying to rise to the occasion. One would think honey would not melt in the mouths of anyone in the House today. Many other days in this House I have heard really vile personal attacks and attempts to make this a “Which side are you on?”.

As the hon. member pointed out, to say that any member in this House is in some way similar, supportive, like, or comparable to the Taliban is certainly disrespectful to why we are here as parliamentarians and disrespectful for what we are actually trying to accomplish, however we are going to vote on this.

I would like to thank the member. I am supposed to ask a question, I suppose, but I just wanted to let him know that I appreciated his comments.

• (1625)

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, that is not one of the usual zingers we get from the member for Timmins—James Bay. I appreciate his comments.

I do recall when we voted in March 2006 discussing this with a colleague of his, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, the day of the vote. He had some issues and he voted the way he felt was right. I voted the way I felt. It does not mean that we feel any less well toward our troops.

People know that his colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore is a strong supporter of the troops as are the members over here. I should also say that, I agree, one of the biggest decisions we can make is to move troops into harm's way, move Canadian citizens into harm's way.

I also believe it is a huge decision for Canada to not put more money into international development in other parts of the world. There are millions of citizens in this world who are dying everyday because they do not get the assistance they deserve, frankly, from some of the richer nations. Those are the kinds of equations that I have wrestled with in my own head, as I am sure he and other members have as well.

It is an important motion and we need to move forward. This place works at its best and the great episodes in parliamentary history in Canada were done in a tone of civility, not in a tone of nastiness. We should do that as often as we can.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like the member for Timmins—James Bay, I listened with interest to the speech from my colleague. Obviously, my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has the respect of everybody in this chamber. I have no doubt that he has similar respect from the constituents in his riding. I know how hard he works for the constituents in his riding.

On that point, I wonder if the member has had an opportunity to converse with any member of the armed forces who has actually been to Afghanistan and returned with any on-the-ground accounts of progress which have been made by our troops in Afghanistan.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I will preface my comments by suggesting that the member for Brant, probably more than any other member I can think of in this House, is a person of civility and conducts himself in a way we should all aspire to.

As I have said, I come from a military riding. I have met with a number of people who have served in Afghanistan and with families who have lost beloved family members in Afghanistan. There have been a number from Nova Scotia. My colleague from Cape Breton—Canso would know that. I think we have eight or nine members from Nova Scotia.

It is a very sobering experience to talk to people who have lost family members. It is a very informative experience to talk to people who have served in Afghanistan and their learning must not be lost.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate this afternoon. I want to indicate at the outset that I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster.

We are here basically debating a motion that is principally a procedural motion. It is not prescriptive, it is not proactive, and the guts of the motion, if I may put it that way, state that a special committee consisting of 12 members be appointed to consider the Canadian mission in Afghanistan.

It is fairly unusual that the so-called official opposition would decide to use its opposition day to engage in such a procedural debate, but it has to be noted that the government had made a commitment, which has not been kept, to get on with creating this committee and so we too welcome the motion.

As my colleagues who have already participated in the debate this afternoon, the defence critic for the New Democratic Party, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam and the foreign affairs critic, the member for Ottawa Centre, have already indicated, we both welcome the creation of this committee and the opportunity in this brief debate to go beyond the procedural and take this occasion to address some of the more troublesome and substantive aspects of the Afghan mission debate.

We absolutely owe that. It is the very least we owe to the brave men and women in the armed forces, 82 of whom together with one outstanding Canadian diplomat have paid the ultimate price, but vast numbers of whom are continuing and many throughout their lifetime will continue to pay a very heavy price for the burden this has heaped upon them and the sacrifice that has been requested of them.

One needs only to see the many accounts of the horrendous damage to limbs and lives, and the statistics are really quite mind boggling about the psychological damage, the emotional damage that many of these veterans will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

We also owe it to the Afghan people. There have been a great number of voices that have tried to articulate back here in Canada, on behalf of many of the Afghan people, the concerns they have about how the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan, instead of creating greater security in their lives, has actually deepened the problems that plague them in their everyday lives. Unfortunately, the government has been unusually resistant to hearing and unwilling to hear the evidence that has been brought forward again and again.

Hopefully this committee will be an opportunity to air some of those concerns with a completely constructive intent and one hopes a constructive outcome because we have known from the very beginning that there is no military solution to the quagmire in Kandahar. That has been documented over and over again, and yet it continues to be the case that military strategies, more military troops, more military equipment remain the principal preoccupation, the principal response of the government.

I want to say, to be fair, that I have heard some encouraging words here this afternoon from both sides of the House. Members are recognizing more and more that there is no military solution. With short shrift being given, in terms of strategy and particularly in terms of the allocation of resources to development strategies and diplomatic engagement, the situation is not going to improve. That is being increasingly recognized.

I hope very much that what can be accomplished in this special committee on Afghanistan is the opportunity for the voices to be heard, the specific commitments and ideas based on experience to be heard, and what it means to engage in a political process that is the only way to create any kind of lasting peace and meaningful development in Afghanistan.

I hope the voice of Seddiq Weera will begin to be heeded.

● (1630)

I hope the voice of Seddiq Weera will begin to be heeded. Seddiq Weera has spoken before committee on many occasions about the fact that without a political process, without a meaningful commitment to building security and stability in people's lives, the investment will have been wasted. Let me quote briefly what he said:

—a counter-insurgency focus, and that focus is going to fail us. Even Manley's report is telling us how we can win the military intervention. It's a military track that we are focusing on only to achieve peace...you are fighting war on terror in Afghanistan in the wrong way. Isolate the terrorists and bring the Afghans to the political mainstream; for that there is no process.

He goes on to outline what it means to get on to a political track, and without it, it is not going to bring any peace and development to the people of Afghanistan.

I hope that the committee will listen and heed the voice of Oxfam's Matt Waldman, who sets out a positive agenda for community peacebuilding. He states:

Given that existing community peacebuilding has such a significant impact on peace and development, yet benefits only a fraction of the population, there is a powerful case for greater donor support for NGOs engaged in peacebuilding—

He goes on to talk about how there must be a framework for a national strategy for community peacebuilding not just for development. He advocates a national steering group followed by a series of parallel provincial conferences to elaborate local strategies.

I hope that the committee will listen to voices like that of Surendrini Wijeyaratne of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation. She warns that even clear strategies to achieve peace and reconciliation, including transitional justice, will not just evolve on their own.

She warns that the prospect for peace grows more remote as violence continues unabated and no concerted efforts are made to engage the parties in a dialogue for peace. She urges Canada to be

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that voice advocating for peace, and very concretely she calls for a rebalancing of the diplomatic development in military strategies to place greater emphasis on building conditions necessary for an eventual peace process.

She also calls for encouraging the international community and the Afghan government to strengthen conditions for a future peace process and coordinate current efforts for peace. The lack of coordination was one of the things correctly identified by the Manley report. Unfortunately, the recommendations that followed seemed not to flow from the actual insights and analysis of the problems in the current counter-insurgency mission.

The spokesperson for CCIC also put a great deal of emphasis on the importance of supporting women's participation in ongoing peacebuilding efforts and identified the fact that without that there will not be any meaningful lasting peace come out of this.

We supposedly are signatories to the women, peace and security provisions of UN resolution 1325, but there is not an ounce of evidence that the government has taken the challenge of putting women front and centre in the peacebuilding process and has actually supported that in any meaningful way.

I commend to people the very concrete, wise recommendations of those who have been there on the ground and who understand what peacebuilding and robust diplomacy really needs to consist of because without it, this investment will have no prospect for success and no help to rebuild the lives of the beleaguered people of Afghanistan.

● (1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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 Nanaimo—Cowichan, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Brant, Agri-Food.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thought the speech of my hon. colleague was very profound. It speaks to the need for a broader picture here.

We have continually heard in this debate how great the mission is. I respect the efforts that our military is doing. It is doing the job we have asked it to do. What we see in military, Canada's is second to none.

The question of a broader strategy, of whether we can count on the success of the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan as a comprehensive road to peace, is still up for debate. In fact, I think more and more questions are being asked every day.

Last week in the *Globe and Mail* was a whole series on talks with the Taliban and why young people joined the Taliban. Two of the main issues raised were the fact that family members had been killed during air strikes and that the eradication programs against the poppy production had put people into situations of hunger. Therefore, they were joining the insurgency against the efforts in which even our soldiers were involved.

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What does my hon. colleague think of the implications of Canada being alone in Kandahar now with what will be the U.S. marines? So many of our European allies are moving into other regions away from the counter-insurgency war, but we seem to be moving further and further into a counter-insurgency effort. What does she think the implications of that will be on long term peace in a very destabilized region?

• (1640)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I will try to make a brief response to my colleague's question.

It is something of a tragedy and a serious crisis for the credibility of NATO. What we have on the one hand is the overwhelming majority of NATO nations that will not go near the Kandahar counter-insurgency. It is not because they are wimps, not because they are not well trained, not because they do not have the courage of their conviction, but because they are not convinced that this is the way to peace or meaningful development.

Knowing all of that, NATO nevertheless at its top level of command and as a military alliance organization is pleading with all these countries to go in and do what Canada is doing alone, with four or five other countries, to supposedly create the winning conditions for people to rebuild their lives in Kandahar.

The member is quite right to point out that there continue to be serious reservations about this strategy and this flawed mission in Kandahar, which is causing untold damage to people's lives, to infrastructure and to the reputation of Canada, unfortunately.

This is not because our men and women in the Canadian armed forces are not serving extremely capably and conscientiously. It is because they have been assigned to a mission that is deeply flawed and recognized to be so by the vast majority of NATO countries, never mind those outside of that military alliance.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I remember when we had pushed for a debate on Afghanistan just over a year ago and we were denounced as not supporting the mission. I remember very clearly the question the hon. member asked then. She asked where the allies were. I remember the vitriol we heard from the government benches that even asking such questions was tantamount to and a form of disloyalty and treason. Yet the question ever since then has been where are the allies? In fact, the Prime Minister and his cabinet have stood up and said that we will not continue the mission unless we understand where the allies are.

The member was asking those questions when it was clear Canada had been signed on to a counter-insurgency war under Operation Enduring Freedom. At the present time, Canada will once again be alone with the U.S. The rest of our allies, where are they? They are in other areas.

Does the hon. member feel that history has come full circle once again?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Halifax has five seconds to respond.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I think sadly that the very questions that we raised on the front end of this in every debate, one was what are really the timetables and targets—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Debate, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to follow the member for Halifax, who has brought her wealth of experience to the House of Commons. It is very clear from what she has said this afternoon that she has enormous wisdom to share with members of the House of Commons. Hopefully, members from all four corners of the House will have heard her words of wisdom and will act accordingly.

I rise to speak to the motion brought in by the Liberal Party, the Liberal opposition motion that moves to form a special committee to oversee the mission in Afghanistan. It is very clear that this corner of the House we will support it, but it is a procedural motion. It is something the government ought to have brought in and presumably would have brought in.

It is much more relevant and pertinent to raise concerns about the issue as a whole, rather than the procedural motion, which is very simple and straightforward and presumably will be adopted by this House later today.

Both the member for Halifax and the member for Timmins—James Bay, when he rose to ask a question a few moments ago, raised the importance of our mission in Afghanistan.

We have incredibly competent and dedicated members of the Canadian Forces who are serving overseas. They serve in respect to our democratic system under the command, essentially, of this democratic body, which is the House of Commons.

Both the member for Timmins—James Bay and the member for Halifax noted the importance of making appropriate decisions. We have tremendous power over members of the Canadian Forces. We have to ensure the decisions we make in the House of Commons are decisions that reflect the will of the Canadian people and also reflect what the experts, those who know these areas very well, have indicated to us should be the appropriate direction.

Over the next few minutes, I want to talk both about what Canadians have said as a whole and what individuals have said about the mission in Afghanistan and how Canada can play a role that will bring about peace and development in Afghanistan, which I believe in most minds of Canadians is the most appropriate role.

A recent poll indicated that 85% of Canadians did not believe the mission should continue past February 2009. Yet a few weeks ago in the House of Commons members of other parties voted to continue the mission. Very clearly, Canadians are speaking out and saying they have concerns about this mission as a whole. They do not have concerns about our Canadian Forces personnel and their dedication. They have concerns about the political direction the government has given, through the House of Commons, to the mission.

If 85% of Canadians do not believe the mission should continue past February 2009, then one must ask the question, why? I believe it is partly because Canadians believe profoundly that our role should be to stimulate development in Afghanistan. The fact that over 90% of the resources we are investing in Afghanistan are military in nature, not developmental in nature, I believe is a source of much concern to many Canadians.

As well, I think Canadians are reflecting misgivings about what they see happening in Afghanistan, and I will come back to this in a moment.

It is important to note, as we did in the House a few weeks ago, that a report from Oxfam indicated Afghans living in Kandahar province were asked what their major sources of insecurity were. They did not indicate the Taliban or international forces, Canadian Forces, as being the source of insecurity. The Oxfam study showed that the top areas of concern for Afghani people living in Kandahar province were: first, the Afghani police and the Afghani army; and second, warlords. I think those are two sources of misgivings that Canadians have from coast to coast to coast over the direction of our mission.

● (1645)

Let us look then at those who may know better the whole issue of our mission in Afghanistan and the appropriateness of it. I will quote a number of individuals because I think it is apt and relevant that we do so.

Major-General Andrew Leslie, Chief of the Land Staff, back in 2005 said very clearly, “every time you kill an angry young man overseas, you're creating 15 more who will come after you”.

Captain Leo Docherty, who is a British aide-de-camp, indicated in *The Telegraph* in 2006 that Afghanistan was:

—a textbook case of how to screw up a counterinsurgency...and all we are doing is surviving. It's completely, barking mad. It's a pretty clear equation—if people are losing homes and poppy fields they will go and fight. I know I would. We've been grotesquely clumsy.

André Flahaut, who is the Belgian defence minister, suggested that:

—we finally reflect on an exit strategy...The situation is deteriorating and, over time, NATO forces risk appearing like an army of occupation.

Retired Colonel Michel Drapeau indicated, “I don't think Canada is winning the war” and “This war is not winnable”.

Former head of the British armed forces indicated last summer that Afghanistan was facing “strategic failure” and “The situation in Afghanistan is much worse than many people recognize. We need to face up to that issue”.

The British House of Commons foreign affairs committee indicated:

—there has been a worrying deterioration in the security situation in Afghanistan, and that there are signs that the tactics that have brought such devastation to Iraq are being replicated in Afghanistan....negligible progress has been made reducing opium poppy cultivation.

Those who know first-hand and who ought to know about the mission in Afghanistan and its level of appropriateness say very clearly that it is not an appropriate mission. In this corner of the House, we believe, as do most Canadians, that the most appropriate use of Canadian skills and Canadian abilities is to put the emphasis on a developed Afghanistan, to put the emphasis on bringing about peace in Afghanistan.

It is important to note that, with the extension that the House considered a few weeks ago, in 2011 the mission in Afghanistan will have been a conflict that Canada has been involved with that will be two years longer than the Vietnam war. We are talking about an

Business of supply

extensive period of time. We are talking about tremendous sacrifice in Canadian and Afghani lives. In fact, over 80 Canadians thus far have given their lives in this conflict. One can presume, with the extension to 2011, that many more will also give their lives.

In this corner of the House, we are saying that we do not believe this is the appropriate mission for Canada. We do not believe this is the appropriate mission for our very dedicated, skilled and competent armed forces. We believe there is another path to take. We believe in listening to the voices we have heard, voices from Afghanistan and also from other individuals around the world, that our approach on Afghanistan is the appropriate one for Canada and the appropriate one to bring about the peace and peaceful reconstruction, which we all want to see there.

● (1650)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fearmongering party sitting over there nitpicks little quotes here and there and tries to make a case for saying it does not want to be in Afghanistan. What is of interest is that all socialist parties around the world do not accept its view of this thing.

The BBC has just reported that 17 Afghan road workers were killed by militants. How do those members expect to provide security to development workers if militants keep killing people?

● (1655)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, this changes a bit the respectful tone that we have had in the House most of the day on this issue. It is sad that one member of the House is not adopting the respectful tone that other members in the House have adopted.

What the member contends is simply not true but he gives me the opportunity to read into the record a number of other quotations that I hope the House will take under advisement.

First, the former prime minister of Italy and former president of the European Union, Romano Prodi, said:

The military solution in Afghanistan will not succeed in getting a result, the problem must have a political solution.

Let's be clear, no increase in the number of troops in Afghanistan will be able to resolve such an awful problem as this.

The former head of the UN mission in Afghanistan said:

You can't resolve it by killing the Taliban. You have to win people over. That is done with good governance, decent police, diplomacy with Pakistan, and development.

The NATO secretary general said:

...the final answer in Afghanistan will not be a military one and cannot be a military one.

The final answer in Afghanistan is called reconstruction, development and nation-building.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respectfully ask the member how he would square up his comments that we are there for the wrong reasons or that we should not be conducting ourselves in a military way.

Business of supply

With the military, 83% of Afghans now have medical access. Without the military, only 9% had access. With the military, because of its protection of the Afghan people, the infant mortality rate is down 22% since 2001 and 40,000 more babies survive every year. With the protection of the Canadian army, 4,000 new medical facilities have opened nationwide since 2004. The number of tuberculosis cases resulting in death declined by 50% annually. Over 103 tuberculosis cases were diagnosed and treated between 2001 to 2006.

None of those things would have happened if there was no security. I wonder how he can possibly square the position of the NDP of pulling the military out when it is the military that provides the security which gives these results.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, NATO statistics indicate that insurgent attacks and security issues have climbed from 4,500 incidents in 2006 to about 7,400 in 2007. The percentage of girls going to school is one in five at the primary level and one in twenty at the secondary school level.

I have quoted a number of experts who have taken a look in a non-partisan way at the mission and raised real concerns around how we approach actually bringing about peaceful reconstruction in Afghanistan. I will quote one more.

The head of the British forces said:

...body counts are a corrupt way of measuring success... It is building civic society which is essential. Talking simply in terms of winning the war is meaningless.

The former adviser to the ISAF said—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

On Canada's mission in Afghanistan, our government places a very high value on having non-partisan support from this Parliament on the way forward. I would gently make note that this morning when I was in the House I found it rather perplexing that the mover of the motion got into the level of partisan rhetoric that he did.

However, the Prime Minister appointed a panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan, commonly known as the Manley panel. The independent panel was tasked with considering the options available to Canada after the existing parliamentary mandate for our mission expired in February 2009.

It was no small task. The panel had barely three months in which to report and hundreds of perspectives to consider. It travelled to Afghanistan to see for itself what was going on, not only in Kandahar but in other parts of the country. It had the heavy responsibility of identifying ways of ensuring that the good work we could do would be worth the cost.

As the House knows, the independent panel did an exemplary job. It filled its mandate in every respect and it did it on time. It recommended that Canada remain in Kandahar to finish the job that we had volunteered to do. It did not say that it should be an open-ended commitment or one that Canada should undertake alone. It

recommended that very specific conditions be met in order for the mission to continue.

I think the hon. members are familiar with the key recommendations that the panel made. To start with, it recommended not only that Canada's mission in Kandahar should continue but that it should be contingent on support from our allies in NATO and ISAF and, furthermore, that we assert even stronger diplomatic leadership on this file internationally so that civilian and military efforts are joined up and mutually reinforcing.

The Prime Minister announced shortly after the panel's report was issued that he broadly accepted its recommendations. Since then, we have seen a number of important actions that demonstrate the government's commitment to following through.

The panel report called for a new cabinet committee on Afghanistan. In early February, the Prime Minister announced the creation of such a committee, composed of all the key ministers, Foreign Affairs, National Defence, International Cooperation and Public Safety, under the capable stewardship of the Minister of International Trade. The panel called for the creation of a coordinating task force to bring together the work of these departments. The Prime Minister created a new Afghanistan task force in the Privy Council Office to support the work of the cabinet committee.

The panel recommendations were not limited to the Canadian government, however. It also dealt with our relations with our partners abroad, most notably the United Nations and NATO, as well as the need for greater coordination on the ground in Afghanistan.

For example, the Manley panel called for Canada to press for the appointment of a new special representative for the United Nation Secretary General for Afghanistan to lead and coordinate the wide ranging UN efforts there, as well as to strengthen the UN's relationship with the rest of the international community in Afghanistan.

We followed through on this. Just weeks ago, we were pleased to congratulate Kai Eide on his appointment as the new UN special envoy to Afghanistan. The Minister of Foreign Affairs met with Mr. Eide in Bucharest. We look forward to working closely with him in Kabul.

We also responded to the panel's recommendation for greater coordination of our Canadian civilian-led efforts in Kandahar. To meet this need, we have deployed a senior representative of Canada to Kandahar who is charged with ensuring the coherence of our work in development, police training, engagement with the corrections and justice sectors and so on. She is the second most senior Canadian civilian in Afghanistan reporting directly to the ambassador or Kabul.

Finally, what is also of far-reaching importance is the government's efforts in renewing NATO's commitment to Afghanistan and its commitment to sharing the burden among allies in the most dangerous parts of the country.

Business of supply

The world was watching when Canada's Parliament agreed to extend our mission in southern Afghanistan through to 2011. The world was watching when the House expressly stipulated that this extension was conditional on getting help from our partners.

● (1700)

I believe that Canadians should be proud that we were able to arrive at a broadly supported position in the House so that the Afghanistan mission was neither a Liberal nor a Conservative mission, but a Canadian one.

I firmly believe that this display of national solidarity was instrumental in convincing other allies to step forward to meet our conditions as passed by the House.

As we all know, the government asked for a partner to deploy an additional battle group to Kandahar to augment the Canadian presence there, to provide the stability to enable reconstruction development and the Afghan government's authority and capability to take root.

We also asked for the provision of helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance to protect the lives of Canadian soldiers on the ground.

At the NATO summit in Bucharest, France announced that it would send a battalion to eastern Afghanistan, an area of the country where insurgent attacks are, sadly, still not rare. As a result, the United States, which is currently the major troop contributor in the east, announced that it would deploy a battalion south to Kandahar.

On helicopters and UAVs, we have already made considerable progress with our allies in getting offers for what we need.

The government commissioned the independent panel because we knew that a clear, national consensus was necessary for Canada to find its way forward in Afghanistan. Then we endorsed the panel's recommendations and made them the centrepiece of a bipartisan motion in the House for exactly the same reason.

I am pleased to note today the clear results we have already obtained in just a few months to strengthen both the political and military aspects of the mission. Thanks to our determined action, Canadians in Afghanistan will be better supported than ever before and they will have an even greater ability to help the people of Afghanistan to achieve a free, secure and peaceful nation of their own.

I note in closing something that happened in the House on the night that we had the vote, and it was so quintessentially Canadian. Many members in the House tonight will recall when we had the vote that when it was the Liberals' turn to rise and vote, up in the corner of the House were some demonstrators who stood and had their say.

I must admit that it was one of the first times in the 15 years that I have had the privilege of being in the House that I have ever had that happen. I found it a little disconcerting. I wondered what would happen here. "End it; don't extend it", was their cry.

What happened was quintessentially Canadian. As they were very well ushered out of this place by the guards who do such a tremendous job for us around this entire precinct, a couple of the

older folks could not get their jackets on and the guards helped them to get their jackets on as they were leaving the House still chanting, "End it; don't extend it".

That is quintessentially Canadians. It is something that we can all be so proud of. It is our heritage. It is who we are. It is the democracy that we have.

What we are doing in Afghanistan is simply giving to the people of Afghanistan the same possibility of having what we have in Canada, which is so quintessentially Canadian, that we can agree to disagree. We can even vehemently disagree with each other, but we do so with respect and we do so within the civility of our great Canadian society.

I am very proud of the House and I am even proud of those demonstrators.

● (1705)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to address this House today on such an important issue. The motion tabled by the opposition is a good opportunity for us to reinforce our commitment to help Afghanistan recover from decades of hardship and poverty.

Canada has a responsibility to the people of Afghanistan. In 2006, along with more than 60 nations and organizations, Canada endorsed the Afghan Compact, an international agreement that provides a framework for cooperation between the Afghan government and the international community. This agreement sets out benchmarks in three priority areas: security, governance and socio-economic development. Canada's efforts have made a real difference in helping Afghans work toward these benchmarks and we must continue to build on those efforts.

We recognize that Canada's mission in Afghanistan is difficult. It is also dangerous, and we continue to feel immense challenges in this area. There is no question that the security situation in some parts of Afghanistan is volatile, to say the least, but the security situation is not the only obstacle that we continue to face. We, along with the Afghan government and our partners, are working intensely to address other major issues, like the narcotics trade, official corruption and the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The challenges are indeed complex and diverse, but hope for a better future is growing. Afghans have seen concrete progress throughout the country in the last few years. Of course many of these immense challenges remain. Nevertheless, with the help of Canada, other donor countries, and in no small part the individual efforts of Afghans, our efforts are going a long way.

Let me give some examples of Canada's reconstruction and development role in Afghanistan and the results that we have been achieving. Canada stood firmly by the Afghan people when presidential and parliamentary elections were held and a new constitution was adopted. Women now represent more than one-quarter of all parliamentarians in Afghanistan. Such a huge political transformation would not have been possible without the support of the international community.

Business of supply

Afghans are now participating in grassroots democracy through the election of more than 20,000 community development councils across the country. These councils are elected at the local level to make decisions on community development priorities. More than 530 community development councils have been elected in Kandahar province alone and more than 690 local projects have been completed to date. These projects range from rehabilitating roads, to digging canals, to building power lines and are providing lasting benefits to households and communities.

Safety and security are major concerns in Afghanistan and once again, Canada is there to help. So far, Canadian assistance has helped secure 16,000 heavy weapons and has contributed to the disarmament of 63,000 former combatants. We are also supporting demining activities in the country. Our contribution to mine action programs has helped avoid countless deaths and crippling injuries.

The number of landmine victims has decreased by 55% compared to levels just six years ago. One day children will be able to play anywhere in Afghanistan without having to fear landmines. One day crops will replace these landmines and agricultural development will flourish.

There are clear signs of economic improvement in Afghanistan's wealth. For example, the country's per capita income doubled between 2003 and 2006. Through our support of Afghan national programs such as the national solidarity program, we are actively contributing to that economic growth by helping to create the jobs that are essential to reducing poverty.

We are also helping to grow the economy through our support of Afghanistan's microfinance program. CIDA is the lead donor to this program. We are proud to say that it works wonderfully. It makes financial services and small loans available to poor Afghans, especially women who would otherwise not be able to access them.

Thanks to this award winning program, more than 418,000 Afghans are able to undertake income generating activities such as small business and farming. This additional income is literally transforming lives as families can now afford to send their children to school, access health care and provide other basic necessities.

• (1710)

We are working with professional organizations like UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross to help improve health services in Afghanistan. This is measurable, thanks to support from Canada and the international community. Access to basic medical services in Afghanistan has increased more than 80%, up from less than 10% in 2002. There has been a substantial reduction in infant mortality across the country, which has dropped by almost one-quarter since 2001.

We have accomplished a lot in Afghanistan. Much more still needs to be accomplished. That is why Canada is one of the world's leading donors to Afghanistan. It is also why we are continuously exploring ways to improve the work that we do. A lot of work lies ahead, but we are on the right track. The courage of the Afghan people, especially girls and women, is inspiring all of us to continue our efforts. The Afghan people are counting on our support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I declare the amendment carried.

(Amendment agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The next question is on the main motion, as amended.

• (1715)

[*English*]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion, as amended?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Call in the members.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 81*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Ambrose
Anderson	André
Angus	Arthur
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Barnes	Batters
Bélanger	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bellavance
Bennett	Benoit
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bezan	Bigras
Black	Blackburn
Blaikie	Blais
Blaney	Bonin

Boshcoff
 Boucher
 Breitzkreuz
 Brown (Oakville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Brunelle
 Calkins
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Casey
 Chan
 Chong
 Clarke
 Coderre
 Comuzzi
 Crête
 Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
 Cummins
 D'Amours
 Day
 Del Mastro
 Deschamps
 Dewar
 Dhalla
 Dosanjh
 Duceppe
 Easter
 Epp
 Faille
 Finley
 Flaherty
 Folco
 Galipeau
 Godfrey
 Goldring
 Goodyear
 Gravel
 Guimond
 Hanger
 Harvey
 Hearn
 Hill
 Hubbard
 Jaffer
 Jennings
 Kadis
 Karetak-Lindell
 Keeper
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Laframboise
 Lalonde
 Lavallée
 Lebel
 Lee
 Lemieux
 Lukiwski
 Lunney
 MacAulay
 Malhi
 Maloney
 Mark
 Marston
 Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
 Masse
 Matthews
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Ménard (Hochelaga)
 Menzies
 Mills
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Mulcair
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Nadeau
 Neville
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Ouellet
 Paradis
 Pearson
 Picard
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Bouchard
 Bourgeois
 Brison
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinooge
 Byrne
 Cannis
 Carrie
 Casson
 Charlton
 Christopherson
 Clement
 Comartin
 Cotler
 Crowder
 Cullen (Etobicoke North)
 Cuzner
 Davidson
 DeBellefeuille
 Demers
 Devolin
 Dhaliwal
 Dion
 Dryden
 Dykstra
 Emerson
 Eyking
 Fast
 Fitzpatrick
 Fletcher
 Freeman
 Gallant
 Godin
 Goodale
 Gourde
 Guarnieri
 Hall Findlay
 Harris
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Holland
 Ignatieff
 Jean
 Julian
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Laforest
 Lake
 Lauzon
 Layton
 LeBlanc
 Lemay
 Lessard
 Lunn
 Lussier
 MacKenzie
 Malo
 Manning
 Marleau
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 Mayes
 McDonough
 McGuire
 McTeague
 Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
 Merrifield
 Minna
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Murray
 Nash
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Paquette
 Patry
 Petit
 Plamondon
 Prentice
 Priddy

Routine Proceedings

Proulx
 Rajotte
 Redman
 Reid
 Ritz
 Roy
 Savoie
 Scheer
 Scott
 Siksay
 Simard
 Smith
 Sorenson
 St. Amand
 Steckle
 Strahl
 Sweet
 Temelkovski
 Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Tilson
 Tonks
 Tweed
 Van Loan
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 Volpe
 Warawa
 Wasylcyia-Leis
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Rae
 Ratansi
 Regan
 Richardson
 Rodriguez
 Savage
 Scarpaleggia
 Schellenberger
 Sgro
 Silva
 Skelton
 Solberg
 St-Hilaire
 Stanton
 Storseth
 Stronach
 Szabo
 Thi Lac
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Toews
 Trost
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Vincent
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Watson
 Williams
 Yelich

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Allison
 Barbot
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Carrier
 Gagnon
 Grewal
 Hinton
 Komarnicki
 Miller
 Pallister
 Shipley
 Anders
 Bonsant
 Cardin
 Doyle
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 Lévesque
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The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed from April 7 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women.

● (1755)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

Routine Proceedings

(Division No. 82)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra
 Angus
 Atamanenko
 Bagnell
 Barnes
 Bell (Vancouver Island North)
 Bellavance
 Bevilacqua
 Bigras
 Blaikie
 Bonin
 Bouchard
 Brison
 Brunelle
 Cannis
 Chan
 Christopherson
 Comartin
 Crête
 Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
 Cuzner
 DeBellefeuille
 Deschamps
 Dhaliwal
 Dion
 Dryden
 Easter
 Faillie
 Freeman
 Godin
 Gravel
 Guimond
 Holland
 Ignatieff
 Julian
 Karetak-Lindell
 Laforest
 Lalonde
 Layton
 Lee
 Lessard
 MacAulay
 Malo
 Marleau
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Ménard (Hochelaga)
 Minna
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Murray
 Nash
 Ouellet
 Patry
 Picard
 Priddy
 Rae
 Redman
 Rodriguez
 Savage
 Scarpaleggia
 Sgro
 Silva
 St-Hilaire
 Steckle
 Szabo
 Thi Lac
 Basques)
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Vincent
 Wasylycia-Leis
 Wilson

André
 Asselin
 Bachand
 Bains
 Bélanger
 Bell (North Vancouver)
 Bennett
 Bevington
 Black
 Blais
 Boshcoff
 Bourgeois
 Brown (Oakville)
 Byrne
 Casey
 Charlton
 Coderre
 Cotler
 Crowder
 Cullen (Etobicoke North)
 D'Amours
 Demers
 Dewar
 Dhalla
 Dosanjh
 Duceppe
 Eyking
 Folco
 Godfrey
 Goodale
 Guarnieri
 Hall Findlay
 Hubbard
 Jennings
 Kadis
 Keeper
 Laframboise
 Lavallée
 LeBlanc
 Lemay
 Lussier
 Malhi
 Maloney
 Marston
 Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
 Masse
 Matthews
 McDonough
 McGuire
 McTeague
 Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
 Mulcair
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Nadeau
 Neville
 Paquette
 Pearson
 Plamondon
 Proulx
 Ratansi
 Regan
 Roy
 Savoie
 Scott
 Siksay
 Simard
 St. Amand
 Stronach
 Temelkovski
 Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
 Tonks
 Volpe
 Wilfert
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NAYS

Members

Abbott
 Albrecht
 Ambrose
 Arthur
 Batters
 Bezan
 Blaney
 Breitreuz
 Brown (Barrie)
 Calkins
 Carrie
 Chong
 Clement
 Cummins
 Day
 Devolin
 Emerson
 Fast
 Fitzpatrick
 Fletcher
 Gallant
 Goodyear
 Hanger
 Harvey
 Hearn
 Hill
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Lemieux
 Lunn
 MacKenzie
 Mark
 Menzies
 Mills
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Paradis
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Reid
 Ritz
 Schellenberger
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Toews
 Tweed
 Van Loan
 Verner
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 Watson
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Ablonczy
 Allen
 Anderson
 Baird
 Benoit
 Blackburn
 Boucher
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinooge
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Casson
 Clarke
 Comuzzi
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Dykstra
 Epp
 Finley
 Flaherty
 Galipeau
 Goldring
 Gourde
 Harris
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Jaffer
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 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Lake
 Lebel
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 Manning
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 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Petit
 Prentice
 Rajotte
 Richardson
 Scheer
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 Solberg
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Tilson
 Trost
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Williams

PAIRED

Members

Allison
 Barbot
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Carrier
 Gagnon
 Grewal
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Anders
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 Cardin
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The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Private Members' Business

[English]

It being 5:58 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]

DOPING IN SPORT

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should continue to engage in the anti-doping movement, encouraging national governments to follow Canada's lead and ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Motion No. 466 which asks the government to continue to engage in the anti-doping movement and encourage other nations to ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

When I was younger, I participated in a lot of sports myself. I was never a Wayne Gretzky of my sport but I always played for fun and for the love of the game. I played hockey, baseball, curling and football at various times in my life. I played hockey with players who went on to play in the original six NHL. I played baseball with players who went on to compete at a very high level in their sport.

When I was participating as an athlete, the furthest thing from anyone's mind was doping. None of the excellent athletes I competed with or against ever dreamed of using performance enhancing drugs to give themselves an advantage. However, since then, times have changed dramatically.

In 1988, the world watched, Canadians were ashamed and a great athlete's career was ruined as a Canadian sprinter ran the 100 metre dash in world record time, only to later test positive for steroids and have his gold medal taken from him. This event brought shame to our great country and it highlighted the need for a coordinated global front in the fight against performance enhancing drugs in sport.

Eventually there was vindication for Canada, and Canadians from coast to coast to coast swelled with pride in 1996 when our own Donovan Bailey became the fastest man in the world, running the 100 metres in world record time and doing it cleanly.

As we look forward to an Olympic Games this summer, and especially as we look forward to the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver, we owe it to Canadians to keep up the fight against performance enhancing drugs so that Canadians can enjoy clean games and so all athletes will have a fair chance to compete and win.

The Government of Canada stands firm in its commitment to be among the global leaders of the anti-doping movement and to the work of the international community to apply an internationally recognized framework against doping in sport.

In the Speech from the Throne, our government's five priorities were outlined: strengthening Canada's sovereignty and place in the world; strengthening the Federation and democratic institutions;

providing effective economic leadership for a prosperous future; tackling crime and strengthening the security of Canadians; and improving the environment and health of Canadians.

The government's continued support to engage in the anti-doping movement is aligned with those priorities, focusing on the broader context of strengthening Canada's place in the world and by working in policy areas related to the health and well-being of Canadians involved in sport and their impact upon youth.

The UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport provides a mechanism through which governments can engage in the anti-doping movement, including support for the World Anti-Doping Agency and the world anti-doping code and international standards which aim to harmonize anti-doping policies and programs.

As a country, Canada played a leadership role in the development and adoption of the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport. Canada chaired a committee of international experts which drafted the convention. Canada was the second member state in the world to table its acceptance of the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

In the future, in order for the UNESCO convention to have worldwide reach and strength, we must be sure that we continue to encourage other governments to follow our lead and ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport. Significant progress has been made as 79 UNESCO member states have ratified it to date, but much more work can and should be done.

Before I speak further about the Convention Against Doping in Sport, I would like to talk briefly about what an extraordinary organization in my riding is doing to educate young people about the dangers of performance enhancing drugs.

● (1800)

The Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in St. Marys, Ontario, reaches out to young people who are interested in the game of baseball. It takes every opportunity, through a variety of youth programming, to use baseball as a medium to preach the message of staying off drugs. This message is communicated in varying forms through the dynamic Kids on Deck summer baseball program, which involves week long camps for boys and girls.

The Hall of Fame is currently fundraising for the construction of a baseball academy, a dormitory style theme-roomed complex that will significantly increase the number of participants in the Kids on Deck program. This will help the Hall of Fame take an even stronger role in promoting the benefits of healthy living and staying off drugs.

Any time that young people visit the Hall of Fame, there is always significant time inside the curriculum to address the drug problem.

With 226 Canadians having played in the major leagues, including more than a dozen presently making a strong impact in their clubs, with the Toronto Blue Jays turning the page and seemingly headed for a glorious year, with Canada recently qualifying for one of the eight berths in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, and Toronto hosting one of the four world classic regionals in March 2009, baseball has a bright horizon in Canada.

Private Members' Business

Given the circumstances, I believe that the message of the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame to stay off drugs is going to reach more youth.

Given the importance of community actors and non-governmental institutions in fighting drug use in sport, I would like to take this moment to publicly recognize and thank the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame, under the direction of President and CEO Tom Valcke, for everything it is doing to promote a message of healthy living and clean sport.

I would like to thank all sports organizations across this country that are doing their part to help keep sports clean.

Of course, as the government, there is a lot more to our commitment to sport than just fighting drug use. Our larger strategy is one that promotes healthy outcomes for Canadians of all ages.

Recently, our government made an exciting announcement. We have re-launched the immensely popular ParticipACTION program. ParticipACTION was founded in 1971. It is a charitable, non-profit organization that promoted physical fitness activity throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Unfortunately, under the previous government, ParticipACTION had its partnership with the federal government ended in 2001. There is no better time to renew that partnership than now. Our government is providing \$5 million over two years to renew our fruitful partnership with ParticipACTION.

According to Statistics Canada, 36% of Canadians are overweight, of which 23% are obese. Among children and adolescents aged 2 to 17, 26% are overweight, of which 8% are obese. Over the past 25 years, the overweight and obesity rate among adolescents aged 12 to 17 has more than doubled and the obesity rate has tripled.

The time for action is now. We can help fight this obesity epidemic by promoting healthy lifestyles for Canadians. That is why we are proud to partner once again with ParticipACTION.

Our government has done so much more though. We believe that an effective way to promote active lifestyles for children is to provide incentives for their parents who want to enrol them in sports activities. Therefore, our government has instituted the \$500 child fitness tax credit. For each child, parents or guardians can claim a tax credit of up to \$500 against the cost of registering their children in sports or fitness activities.

Canadians should consult Revenue Canada to learn which sport and fitness activities are eligible for this tax credit. A good rule of thumb is that anything that makes kids sweat is probably eligible. From soccer and hockey, to dance lessons, to basketball or volleyball, or karate lessons, this new initiative from our government will make it easier for young people to get involved, be active and get healthy.

Really, when it comes to physical fitness, sport and healthy activity, our government is going above and beyond. We are providing annual funding of more than \$140 million to support participation and excellence in sport from the playground to the podium.

●(1805)

Let us not forget our contribution of \$552 million to the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. These are just some of the many things we are doing to promote sport in Canada, not the least of which is our fight against performance enhancing drugs and our support for the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

State parties to the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport have agreed to undertake measures such as legislation, regulation, policies or administrative practices to fight doping in sport. The Canadian policy against doping in sport and the Canadian anti-doping program is consistent with the objectives of the UNESCO convention.

We must also ensure that we, as a state party, uphold our ongoing commitment to the UNESCO convention and the anti-doping movement. As such, governments that have deposited their instruments of acceptance have committed to restrict the availability of prohibited substances to facilitate doping controls and to support the UNESCO convention's provision with respect to education.

State parties to the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport agree that education programs should aim to provide updated and accurate information on such matters as the harm of doping, the ethical values of sport, and the health consequences of doping for athletes.

A voluntary fund for the elimination of doping in sport was created as well to assist some state parties who lack resources and expertise to fully develop and implement anti-doping activities consistent with the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

The principle underlying the fund for the elimination of doping in sport, in general, is that more developed countries should assist less developed countries through the provision of funds and expertise. Canada subscribes to that principle. The fund for the elimination of doping in sport, in turn, is vital so that we can build anti-doping capacity globally. The fight against doping in sport will be at its strongest as we will build a network of capable governments throughout the world.

At the first conference of parties to the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport, held in Paris in 2007, Canada was proud to be the first country to contribute to the fund for the elimination of doping in sport. This provided the impetus for others to come forward.

As a demonstration of our firm commitment to the continuing success and strength of the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport, the Department of Canadian Heritage made contributions of close to \$150,000 in the last two years to the fund for the elimination of doping in sport.

Private Members' Business

Canada's contribution to the voluntary fund will help strengthen worldwide anti-doping activities focused on education, capacity building, and coordination in developed countries and those less developed. Clearly, governments are taking the initiative seriously as 13 governments following Canada's initial commitment have already contributed over \$1.2 million U.S. to the fund for the elimination of doping in sport.

The entry into force of the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport marks a new phase in the anti-doping movement where all of the governments could come together to end the scourge of doping in sport. The UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport provides a framework for this goal to take place. However, it needs a forceful application by governments worldwide to ensure that these are not simply words without action.

The Government of Canada has been working and will continue to work hard to encourage national governments that have not already done so to ratify and implement the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport so that future generations are able to enjoy and excel in doping-free sport.

● (1810)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join in this debate tonight. I wonder if Baron de Coubertin who termed the Olympic motto of “swifter, higher, stronger” thought at the time whether or not he would ever have to come back years later and add the word “cleaner” to it? In fact, what we are seeing and faced with now is a significant challenge in cleaning up sport.

As parents in Canada we continue to encourage our children and our young people to take part in sport. We see merit in taking part in sport. It adds to a young person's physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual development as they grow up and take part in sport and compete. It is a great way to meet and learn some of the intrinsic benefits that competition lends itself to.

There is a great challenge out there now. When we watch our newscasts or open the sports pages of any of the big papers, it is certainly not uncommon to see one of the lead stories being that of some high-paid athletes somewhere who have used a performance enhancing drug, a steroid, so that they can gain an advantage over others.

I respect the comments made by my colleague from Perth—Wellington when he mentioned the undertakings of the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame. It is trying to sell the game as a positive experience and something that young men and women should take part in over the course of the summer months. But there is this elephant in the bed, being major league baseball, and this circus that is major league baseball that is going on with congressional and senatorial hearings into the use of a performance enhancing drug in that particular sport.

What probably should have been a heyday and a very special time for major league baseball last year was when one of the players in major league baseball passed the all time home run record. Barry Bonds, in doing so during the whole run up, was under that cloud of whether or not he used a performance enhancing drug.

It certainly took away a great deal from that great accomplishment. I think what we will always see is that record will be identified in the record books with an asterisk. I think that is certainly of concern. It reflects that it is not exclusive to professional sports. It is certainly not exclusive to major league baseball or professional sports.

Probably one of the greatest sporting events in the world and certainly the greatest cycling event is the Tour de France. In recent years 20 participants in the Tour de France have been charged with using performance enhancing drugs.

The 2006 champion, Floyd Landis, the winner of the Tour de France, was stripped of his title and barred from competing in the Tour de France for years to come. A great toll has been taken on these athletes who use performance enhancing drugs.

The use of performance enhancing drugs is not exclusive to the guys. Marion Jones, the U.S. track star in 2000 in Sydney, Australia, captured five Olympic medals, three gold and two bronze. After being examined and denying that she used steroids, she came clean last October. She admitted that she had in fact used performance enhancing drugs. She was seen to have perjured herself during two federal inquiries. She is in a great deal of trouble right now.

The lure is great because if someone is successful as an athlete, whether professional or amateur, everything is amplified. There are the endorsements, the appearance fees and the competition. That lure to be the very best is great and it is significant, but it is wrong.

● (1815)

We are not excluded from it. We Canadians are not squeaky clean. Everybody shared in the shame and the hardship that was the folly of Ben Johnson in 1988 in the Seoul Olympics. He won the 100 metre sprint, but the drug test proved that he was using a performance enhancing drug. That will follow Ben Johnson for the rest of his years. That headline plastered across every newspaper in this country, “From hero to zero”, will be his moniker as he goes forward in life. That is a terrible price to pay, but it was certainly a mistake on his part to embark on this in the first place.

Great strides have been made, but I caution members that the fight is not complete. It is ongoing. In 2005 it was estimated that 25% of elite athletes who competed in international events used some type of performance enhancing substance. It is a continuing battle. It is something that all nations of the world have to work together to combat. That is what we are speaking about today in this legislation.

This motion will be supported by me, by our critic and I would think by most members on the opposition bench. It is very significant. We want to remember that Canada was one of nine countries that developed the original convention and one of the first countries to ratify it. It gives us a legal framework that is both binding and universal. It states clearly the list of prohibited substances that would be deemed illegal, with the exception of some medical instances. This is going to be universal, so that is indeed a positive step.

In passing this motion, Parliament will direct the Government of Canada to undertake a number of steps, and I would like to read them into the record.

Private Members' Business

The Government of Canada will take steps at home to undertake public education to warn of the effects of doping. It will give training, education and support regarding doping to our athletes, coaches, trainers and medical personnel.

The Government of Canada will take the responsibility to ensure proper conduct, the principle of fair play and the protection of health to those who participate in sport. It will work with local, national and other sport NGOs and other organizations to give them the information and tools to achieve the elimination of doping in sport.

It will promote the research, detection, prevention and understanding of the use of substances that enhance athletic performance and share that research internationally. Finally, the Government of Canada will contribute financially to assist other states that are unable to ensure the provisions of their convention.

I think that is notable. This past November, I attended the World Anti-Doping Agency convention in Madrid, Spain, with the Secretary of State for Sport. It was somewhat of a celebration at that time, as our own Canadian, Dick Pound, was outgoing chairman of the agency. He has done an incredible amount on the anti-doping scene internationally. He deserves a great deal of credit and recognition. Certainly what I sensed from that conference over those two days was the great respect for his work and certainly for that of other Canadians and for the contribution they have made with respect to this problem globally.

I am happy that this motion has come forward to the chamber. I look forward to supporting it when it is brought to a vote.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is obviously in favour of the motion introduced by the member for Perth—Wellington. I am sure that all members in this House, like us, believe that the government must continue to combat doping in sport.

Everyone will agree that doping is a real scourge in elite sports, and that there is no room for cheating.

This was demonstrated by the unanimous adoption of the first International Convention against Doping in Sport by the General Conference of UNESCO on October 19, 2005, at its plenary session in Paris. David Howman, the director general of the World Anti-Doping Agency, the WADA, said the following:

The adoption of the Convention by UNESCO is a strong signal of the commitment of the governments of the world to the fight against doping in sport. The drafting of this Convention in just two years was a world record for international treaties. We warmly commend and thank UNESCO for facilitating the process, and we look forward to the treaty coming into force and the ratification by each government.

Until now, many governments could not be legally bound by a non-governmental document such as the World Anti-Doping Code, the document harmonizing regulations regarding anti-doping in all sports and all countries of the world. Governments accordingly drafted the international convention under the auspices of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, enabling them to align their domestic legislation with the code and thereby harmonizing the sport and public legislation in the fight against doping in sport.

The convention is now available for UNESCO member states to ratify according to their respective constitutional jurisdictions. Under UNESCO procedures for this convention, thirty countries must ratify it in order for it to become effective.

Some 192 countries have signed the Copenhagen Declaration on Anti-Doping in Sport, the political document through which governments show their intention to implement the World Anti-Doping Code through ratification of the UNESCO Convention. More than 570 sports organizations have already adopted the code.

We can see that the large majority of UNESCO's member states have already signed the convention and that a number of them have ratified it. The motion debated in this House will not have much of an impact, since the work has already been done in connection with a convention that was unanimously adopted in October 2005.

With this motion, the Conservatives would have us believe that they are trailblazers on an issue where everyone is already in agreement.

Obviously, the Bloc supports the convention against doping in sport. Obviously, everyone does. Anyone who said they were opposed to this motion or this convention would be saying they were in favour of doping and cheating.

Yet with this motion, the Conservatives are trying to say that national governments should "follow Canada's lead" in ratifying the convention. Canada may have been a leader in ratifying some international treaties, but the current Conservative government is hardly a trailblazer.

The Conservative government is the anti-Kyoto government. Is that how Canada is taking the lead? The Conservative government is the government that has done everything in its power to sabotage the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Is that how Canada is taking the lead? The Conservative government is the government that is working to defeat efforts by the United Nations to have the right to water recognized as a universal human right. Is that how Canada is taking the lead?

The Conservative government is the one that, despite the Convention on the Rights of the Child, remains silent on the Omar Khadr affair concerning the child soldier being held in Guantanamo Bay. Is that how Canada is taking the lead? The Conservative government is the government that, despite its membership in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, did away with tools that were essential to defending women's rights. What great leadership on the part of Canada. And the list goes on.

No, Canada is definitely no longer taking the lead, as it once did. It is no longer the country of peacekeepers. It is no longer the country that bridges the gap between eastern bloc and western bloc countries. It is no longer the country that refused to go to war in Iraq. Canada is no longer taking the lead on anything.

• (1825)

The Conservatives' Canada is a country that lets Canadian citizens sentenced to death rot in jail while awaiting execution. Clearly, if we must follow an example, we should follow Quebec's example.

Private Members' Business

We saw what Quebec was capable of in the implementation of the convention on the expression of cultural diversity. And think of the phenomenal work done by Louise Beaudoin.

Many Quebeckers were dynamic and dedicated in their involvement in the fight against doping. Think of how Radio-Canada reporter Robert Frosi raised awareness with his book, *Dope Story*. In it, Mr. Frosi asked some fundamental questions about the future of elite sports becoming a human experimentation lab where athletes are used as guinea pigs. Will tomorrow's athlete be genetically modified? That question is as disturbing as it is important.

Think of Dick Pound, the first president of the World Anti-Doping Agency, WADA. He was the prime mover behind the anti-doping movement. His mission drew him into a number of fights that he never backed down from, including a conflict with the Olympic committee, which was suspected and found guilty of not sanctioning athletes who tested positive, especially in track and field.

Think of Ms. Christiane Ayotte, a chemist specializing in the fight against doping and an international authority in the matter.

Quebec is definitely one example, as was Canada before the Conservatives formed the current government. The truth is that this motion is an attempt to restore its lustre by a government completely lacking in virtue.

The Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this motion because no one is in favour of cheating and we deplore all the collateral damage caused to athletes who seek excellence and whose lifetime efforts are destroyed by a system that demands that the latest record be toppled immediately, no matter the cost. We will vote in favour of this motion, but the Conservatives should not try to improve their image at the expense of those working on making Canada and Quebec exemplary places for elite sport. That would be vile and base.

• (1830)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for a moment about the fact that the member's bill is very important in this age of sports drugging and that Canada has played a leading role for a number of years in putting the UNESCO convention together and supporting the countries of the world taking a stand against doping.

The convention against doping in sport promotes the prevention and ultimate elimination of doping in sport. The aim of UNESCO's anti-doping program is to ensure that all athletes enjoy the right to compete in a clean, honest and equitable environment. The convention also aims to harmonize anti-doping efforts worldwide and acknowledges the mandate of the World Anti-Doping Agency because doping jeopardizes the moral and ethical basis of sport and the health of those involved.

In today's highly competitive sports environment, athletes and athlete support personnel are under increasing pressure to do whatever it takes to win. As a result, the use of performance enhancing drugs in sports is becoming more pervasive and insidious. Under the convention, governments formally agreed to take action collectively and individually to eliminate doping in sport.

Do the members present in the House today remember when Ben Johnson ran such a magnificent race and how proud we all were, only to see him lose the recognition of his feat after testing positive for a banned substance? Today in professional sport the use of steroids is seen by many as normal. It is almost an everyday occurrence.

UNESCO, as the sole United Nations agency with a sports mandate, is implementing a three-pronged strategy to tackle the doping problem.

First, with international cooperation, UNESCO developed the International Convention against Doping in Sport, which entered into force on February 1, 2007, so all countries around the world could apply the force of international law against doping.

Second, with education to successfully eliminate doping in sports, we must focus on the next generation of athletes. UNESCO is developing anti-doping education and prevention programs aimed at fostering the fundamental values that underpin sport and by informing young people of the moral, legal and health consequences of doping.

Third, with capacity building, UNESCO assists governments in the development of a national anti-doping programs and provides policy advice to ensure compliance with the convention. UNESCO also created the fund for the elimination of doping in sport that was established as part of the convention against doping in sport. The fund operates with contributions from member states, private and public bodies, as well as individuals.

Canada has played a leading role in the development of the convention at UNESCO to ensure progress and consensus on international anti-doping. In 2005 the convention was unanimously adopted at the 33rd UNESCO General Conference in Paris, France. Canada became the second country to ratify the convention on November 29, 2005. On December 11, 2006, the convention reached the threshold of the 30 required ratifications, paving the way for its entry into force.

Canada is respected worldwide for its domestic anti-doping programs and policies, which are administered by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport. Canada has demonstrated its commitment to protecting the integrity and spirit of sport by promoting a doping-free, fair and ethical environment for athletes.

The Government of Canada, and this may surprise some, should be commended for announcing that it will continue to host the World Anti-Doping Agency. I say it should be surprising because I am not often one to give credit to the government. The World Anti-Doping Agency's headquarters is in Montreal and Canada reaffirmed its commitment to fight against doping in sport by hosting it for an additional 10 years.

Today, although Canada remains a leader in the worldwide fight against doping in sport, sports bodies must also do everything possible to ensure they award their world game championships only to countries wherein their governments have ratified the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

Private Members' Business

•(1835)

To date, only 70 governments out of 205 member nations of the IOC have ratified the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sports, which is the cornerstone of the IOC's fight against drugs. Clearly these countries must do better or they could potentially find themselves barred from competing in the 2010 Winter Olympics or the 2012 Summer Olympics if they have not ratified the convention.

I want to move away for a moment from the sometimes dry facts about doping in sport to talk just for a moment about what it means to young people who are beginning their careers in sport.

When athletes are young and just beginning to take part in sport, they are full of exuberance and enthusiasm. That comes from succeeding and achieving their goals, goals that they have set with their coaches, for which they have worked weeks and months training, and finally find themselves on the day of a competition.

Over time they have developed and have perhaps started on a winning track. They ultimately come up against those other athletes, athletes whose performance seems just too good to be true, athletes who got their level in sport by not only working hard, but with a little something extra. The day when the straight competitor is defeated by a person who is on enhancing drugs, must be a very rude awakening for them. At some point they must ask themselves what it is all about.

I believe a majority of our Canadian athletes do not dope, but the pressure to compete is very intense. I believe it is up to Parliament and the whole of our society to say to them that we believe in them, that we will do all that we can to ensure their field of dreams is not sullied by cheating with enhancing drugs.

Our Canadian athletes deserve the chance to compete in what my generation called a fair and square environment.

I want to take a moment to thank the member for Perth—Wellington for this private member's motion, as it helps remind parliamentarians and the Canadian people of the importance of having clean athletes in clean sports. I will be recommending to the NDP caucus that we support the bill.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and participate in the debate on Motion No. 466, which asks the government to continue to engage in the anti-doping movement and encourage other nations to ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

The Government of Canada is determined to protect the integrity and values of sport, the athletes and the spirit of sport so athletes can compete fairly and equitably at all levels of competition.

Canada remains a leader in the global fight against doping. Our government is determined to support UNESCO in its efforts, in partnership with the World Anti-Doping Agency and other countries, in advancing the values of fair, ethical and doping free sport.

In Canada we support ethics in sport and continue the fight against doping through the Canadian policy on sport and the Act to Promote Physical Activity and Sport.

Canada has acquired these basic tools. Our government works in close cooperation with provincial and territorial governments and the Canadian sport community to implement the Canadian policy against doping in sport as well as as the Canadian strategy for ethical conduct in sport.

It goes without saying that the Canadian anti-doping program is respected around the world and serves as a model for nations undertaking to eliminate doping in sport.

The International Convention against Doping in Sport, developed under the UNESCO physical education and sport strategy and program, is the result of concerted efforts between countries and the sport movement, with the common objective of promoting the prevention of doping in sport and the fight against this phenomenon in order to put an end to it. The convention is a recognized international mechanism for harmonizing government anti-doping measures, in particular by supporting the World Anti-Doping Agency and recognizing the provisions of the World Anti-Doping Code.

In November 2005 Canada became the second country to ratify the convention. Our country is proud to have played a leading role in its development and adoption. In fact, I can recall when I had the privilege of pairing with a Liberal as he went to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia when this agreement was being forged by the nations of the world and how impressed I was at the dedication of all the nations that were there to get this agreement together.

Since then, we have encouraged all countries to accept or ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport and to give even greater impetus to international government participation in anti-doping. To date, it is encouraging that 79 countries have accepted or ratified the convention. I believe it our duty to encourage all countries to do so.

In 1983 Canada already had a UNESCO anti-doping policy. That policy evolved over the years to reflect the perspectives of partners in the national and international sport community. As the House knows, the Dubin Commission was established following several international doping cases involving Canadian athletes.

Prior to 1991, national sports organizations were responsible for conducting anti-doping analysis in accordance with standards laid down by the Preventive Medicine Council of Canada.

In 1991 the Government of Canada established the Canadian Anti-Doping Agency, an independent, non-profit agency responsible for directing Canadian efforts in the field. The agency was created in response to the recommendations of the Dubin Commission, its mandate to shed light on the use of drugs in sport.

Today the Canadian Centre for Ethics Conduct in Sport administers the Canadian anti-doping program. Canadian athletes who take part in college, university, national and international competitions, as well as the Canada Games must comply with the full provisions of the Canadian anti-doping program.

Our government funds nearly 85% of the centre's operating expenses. The difference is made up through the services the centre offers at Canadian sport competitions and to other anti-doping agencies.

Private Members' Business

● (1840)

In 2007-08, our government gave more than \$4.6 million to the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport to carry out the Canadian anti-doping program. An additional \$700,000 was granted to it under the true sport strategy.

Like UNESCO, Canada acknowledges the importance of continuing education for athletes, athlete supervisory personnel and society as a whole in order to prevent doping. The Canadian program attests to this.

In 1999 the International Olympic Committee, supported by a number of government agencies, governments including that of Canada, and public organizations established the World Anti-Doping Agency to promote and coordinate international anti-doping. In 2003 the agency and its partners, including Canada, developed the first world anti-doping code document containing a set of harmonized rules for anti-doping in sport.

Canada has supported the efforts of the World Anti-Doping Agency since its inception and proudly has had its headquarters in Montreal since 2002. The agency's work and credibility are helping make the most renowned and international competitions such as the Olympics and Paralympic Games examples of dope-free competitions.

Our government is proud that Canada recently renewed the partnership with the World Anti-Doping Agency, which will enable the agency to keep its headquarters in Montreal for another decade.

Canada is also proud to be home to one of the 33 laboratories around the world accredited by the World Anti-Doping Agency. The laboratory of the Institut national de la recherche scientifique of the Université du Québec à Montréal conducts analysis and offers consulting services to anti-doping agencies, including the World Anti-Doping Agency, and major professional sports leagues.

Our government proudly provides \$1 million in financial assistance to the World Anti-Doping Agency. In addition, our government, through the Department of Canadian Heritage, has allocated nearly \$900,000 to the World Anti-Doping Agency's operating budget for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

The Olympic movement also pays the agency an amount equivalent to that provided by government authorities.

Canada's contribution to anti-doping and the UNESCO convention also included \$90,000 in financial support to the UNESCO Secretariat for the convention's development. In addition, Canada was the first country to contribute to the voluntary funding created when the convention came into force. Canada has contributed nearly \$149,000 to the fund in the past two years. The fund will make it possible to develop and implement anti-doping programs concerning, among other things, resource development, the sharing of knowledge and best practices, and international education.

Thirteen countries have followed Canada's example, as a result of which the fund now contains nearly \$1.2 million to assist in developing the less developed countries. For Canada this is an act of solidarity that reinforces anti-doping in sport.

The convention also confirms the common practice of funding the World Anti-Doping Agency through equal funding from governments and the Olympic movement. Canada contributes annually, and its contribution is one of the biggest of any country.

In conclusion, through its programs and sustained financial support, Canada is clearly showing its commitment to anti-doping in sport. UNESCO can rely on Canada's full cooperation so that the largest number of countries in the world accepts the International Convention Against Doping in Sport. Even though 79 countries have accepted or ratified the convention to date, we must continue our efforts to encourage non-signatory countries to accept or ratify the convention soon and to implement it without delay.

Canada is resolved to use every available opportunity, all means at its disposal and its influence to ensure that the use of prohibited substances and methods in sport at last becomes a thing of the past.

I am exceptionally proud of the position that our nation has taken on this issue. This truly is a non-partisan statement. The commitment of the current government to continue to support this program is unshakeable. I congratulate my colleague, the chair of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, on bringing this motion forward.

● (1845)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased to participate in the debate on Motion No. 466, which asks the government to continue to engage in the anti-doping movement and encourage other nations to ratify the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

Like UNESCO, Canada is aware that sport must play an important role in the protection of health, in moral, cultural and physical education and in promoting international peace and understanding. Canada is also convinced of the need to encourage and coordinate international cooperation to eliminate doping in sport.

In Canada, the act to promote physical activity and sport, which was passed in 2003 acknowledges the importance that sport and the promotion of physical activity has for the health and welfare of all Canadians. That act is based on high values and ethical principles, particularly regarding the elimination of doping from sport.

Like the act to promote physical activity and sport, the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport condemns the use of doping in sport as a result of its consequences for the health of athletes and quite frankly, for the principle of fair play.

The UNESCO convention is also intended to be an international instrument that forms the basis of national anti-doping policies and intergovernmental cooperation in the field. Its aim is to protect ethical principles and educational values.

In this perspective, Canada proactively adopted the Canadian policy against doping in sport which is grounded in the fundamental commitment to safeguard the integrity and values of our athletes and of our sports. The purpose of this policy is to prevent the use of substances and methods prohibited in Canadian sport in order to protect individuals who participate in sport in accordance with the rules and spirit of sport. We are going to make sure that those who play by the rules and those who act by the rules have the opportunity for fair play.

Adjournment Proceedings

Based on the Canadian policy against doping in sport, the Canadian anti-doping program which is managed by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, embraces the many national and international developments in the field of anti-doping.

The Canadian anti-doping program is consistent with the world anti-doping code. Its purpose is to deter and detect the use of prohibited substances and methods and thus to protect the right of athletes to participate in fair competitions that comply with the rules of ethics and to ensure the integrity of all of our amateur sports.

The UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport also reflects an awareness of the influence that high level athletes have on youth and of the importance of education to prevent doping.

We in Canada have developed a Canadian strategy for ethical conduct in sport which was approved by the federal, provincial and territorial ministers of sport in April 2002.

That Canadian strategy for ethical conduct in sport which is based on a partnership between the Canadian government and the provincial and territorial governments very clearly reflects one of the principles of the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport. It is that the elimination of this phenomenon depends in part on a gradual harmonization of anti-doping standards and practices in sport and on national and international cooperation.

This strategy, which has been rebranded as the true sport strategy, contains guidelines for a voluntary, collective exercise designed to change attitudes, values and behaviours at various levels of sport in Canada. The True Sport Secretariat coordinates the implementation of this strategy and since May 2003, has been guided by a steering committee of experts from various areas of sports, which include the following: AthletesCAN, the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, the Canadian Olympic Committee, the Coaching Association of Canada, national sports organizations, officials, three provincial and territorial governments, the federal government through Sport Canada, and provincial and territorial sports organizations through the Canadian Council of Provincial/Territorial Sport Federations.

• (1850)

The collaboration in Canada between governments and the Canadian sport community attests to a complementary effort in the prevention of and fight against doping in sport. It makes it possible to ensure the proper conduct of sports events in a spirit of fair play and protects the health of those who take part in them, a principle conveyed by the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport.

At the 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Olympics and Paralympic Winter Games, the eyes of the world will be on our country. Our ability to hold clean and ethical major games will depend on national and international cooperation.

With its research expertise and the Canadian government's commitment to anti-doping in sport, Canada has all the ingredients to provide the Canadian public and the world with high quality games in the spirit of anti-doping in sport.

The UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport, the Canadian strategy for ethical conduct in sport, the Canadian policy against doping in sport and the Canadian anti-doping program

are all tools to guide the development of sport in Canada through exemplary ethics.

The support of the governments of all countries is essential to our common objective of eliminating doping in sport. We will continue to encourage those countries that have not yet ratified the UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport to do so and, to the extent of our capabilities, will offer the expertise and resources necessary for its implementation.

There are a couple of things that I think bring this to light, and I want to explain them.

I am a member of the finance committee. The prebudget consultations took place in October of this year in Victoria, very close to Vancouver where the games will take place, and went right across the country to Halifax.

One of the places we stopped to hear a presentation was in Montreal. The presentation was made by the Canadian Olympic Committee, which is headed up by Mr. Alex Baumann. Most of us will remember that he was the gold medal swimmer for Canada in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. He has done a great deal of work on behalf of the organization and his organization has done a great deal of work on behalf of athletes in our country. Most important, it has done work and wants to do more work on behalf of potential athletes.

His organization's request was for this government to continue to fund the winter Olympics, but also to establish a new protocol and a new funding system for the summer Olympics. To that end, over the next two years, we are investing upward of \$28 million in the Canadian summer Olympic program, under Mr. Baumann's direction.

That commitment is not only about the athletes who are competing today. It is about the potential young people who will engage in sports. They will find it to be a great opportunity for them, whether it be for an education, or learning how to play the sport, or simply being involved with their friends and with athletes of the same ilk.

This is a symbol for the type of commitment the government has to sport in our country, the commitment we have to our athletes and the commitment we have to our children. It fits perfectly well with the motion in front of us today.

• (1855)

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

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to revisit the question that I previously asked about Indian residential school common experience payments.

I will begin by putting into context the political agreement that was signed back in May 2005. I will read one of the very first things that the parties agreed to in the political agreement because it is an important contextual piece. It states:

Canada recognizes the need to continue to involve the Assembly of First Nations in a key and central way for the purpose of achieving a lasting resolution of the IRS legacy, and commits to do so. The Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations firmly believe that reconciliation will only be achieved if they continue to work together;

When I raised the question in the House I talked about two particular issues. One was the common experience payments and the fact that many of the survivors were getting incomplete payments, in their view.

The second issue I raised was the issue around day students. Many day students went to the same schools as some of the other residential school survivors but the day school students went home at the end of the day while the other students stayed overnight. However, it is only the students who stayed overnight who actually ended up with the common experience payments, which seems to me to be a grave inequity.

I know there have been many calls for a reconsideration from both the survivors of the day school students of the residential school experience and some of the children who were in foster care. Under the terms of the political agreement where there was this intent of working together, I would call on the government to continue to work with the Assembly of First Nations in an attempt to find solutions, rather than having day students go back through a very cumbersome process, which simply has not worked, or take their cases to court.

In terms of the common experience payment aspect of my question, I went to the Indian residential schools resolution website and found that a significant number of claims had been processed but a couple of pieces of information were missing. One piece of information missing had to do with how many of the previous residential school students who have received payments received full payment. There was no information on how many of those students actually were compensated for the years they claim they were in a residential school.

We know that most of the challenge facing residential school survivors is the fact that school records have, in many cases, disappeared. In some cases the schools have burned down, and so on.

In addition, almost 20% of the applications that have been received to date have been deemed as not eligible for payment.

I would be interested to know on a couple of those issues how the government is proceeding to look at the number of students who did not receive full payment and the day students who have been deemed not eligible.

● (1900)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in response to the question put to this House by my hon. colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, concerning the processing of common experience payments.

As we know, the Indian residential schools settlement agreement, which began implementation on September 19, 2007, will bring resolution to this unfortunate chapter of our history. This agreement is intended to foster reconciliation between the aboriginal people who attended these schools, their families, their communities and all Canadians.

As the member opposite is aware, an important part of this agreement is the common experience payment. Common experience payments have been made to former students who resided at an eligible federal residential school. Payments are \$10,000 for the first year, or part of a year, plus \$3,000 for each additional year, or part of a year after that.

All former students who lived at an eligible Indian residential school and were alive on May 30, 2005, may receive a CEP upon application. Eligible former students will only have to fill out a CEP application form and the Government of Canada will use its existing records to assess the claim.

A total of \$1.9 billion has been allocated in order to make the common experience payments. To date, the government has received over 90,000 applications. I am pleased to report that since the launch of the common experience payments, as of this day, 78,000 of these applications have been processed.

A total of \$1.2 billion has been paid to the former students through the CEP. This is in addition to the \$82.6 million which was already paid out through the advance payment program to elderly former students.

The government is aware that in some cases unique circumstances have led to some applicants not receiving all the compensation for which they have applied.

In some cases, former students may have calculated the years which they resided at residential schools based on the calendar year rather than the school year.

Former students may have also resided at an Indian residential school for a number of years and subsequently attended a day school. The agreement, which was agreed to by all parties, does not include any day schools. However, some applicants may not distinguish these two experiences when applying for the CEP.

The government is also aware that in some cases records are incomplete. We are continuing to work with former students through a court-approved and supervised process to ensure applicants receive all the compensation for which they are eligible.

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In all cases, applicants receive a detailed letter which outlines the amount of compensation they received and provides them with information on how they can participate in the court-approved process should they wish to do so for reconsideration. Further, an appeal process is also available, which is managed by all the parties to the settlement agreement.

What is important at this time is that we continue to focus on timely and effective implementation of the Indian residential schools settlement agreement, so that former students and their families may benefit from it.

At this time, I would like to draw the member's attention to the other important aspects of the agreement. These include the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which will provide a holistic, comfortable and safe setting for former students to share their experiences. It will also create a complete historical record of this system. As we can see, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be an integral part of the healing process for former students.

The Indian residential schools settlement agreement has also included \$20 million in funding for commemorative activities, as well as \$125 million for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

In closing, I would like to thank all members of this House for improving our commitment to the Indian residential schools settlement agreement.

● (1905)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for taking the time to come and respond to this very important question.

On the Indian residential schools site, there are 37 pages of schools that are currently under review and roughly half of those schools are still pending a decision. I know that there is an appeal process currently in place, but this appeal process has only recently come into place.

I appreciate a timely and effective response, but I wonder what concrete measures, in light of that political accord, the government is currently taking to expedite looking at those schools that are currently still in question.

When we talk about numbers, when we talk about the 16,863 people who have been denied a common experience payment, what we are talking about here is actually not numbers, we are talking about people. We are often talking about elders who, by the very definition, are aging and they simply do not have the time to wait.

So, again, I would like to know what concrete action steps the government is taking in terms of those schools that are pending review?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the concern the member has put forward on this issue as she continues to advocate on behalf of her constituents.

As I stated earlier, we have made great progress on the processing and delivery of the common experience payments. Each applicant and application requires considerable due diligence, which does take time. We are continuing to closely monitor progress and our officials

have been instructed to respond to clients as promptly and as effectively as possible.

Furthermore, every effort will be made to assist former students in receiving all the compensation for which they are eligible.

I want to be clear. The government remains committed to the fair and lasting resolution of the legacy of the Indian residential schools and is taking all the steps necessary to ensure that the common experience payments and all other measures of the Indian residential schools settlement agreement are delivered as quickly and as effectively as possible.

This historic agreement will strengthen the partnerships that we have established and continue to foster, with aboriginal communities and all Canadians, a lasting—

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

AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my request to have additional time on a particular issue was triggered by a response I received from the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food on February 14. I asked the minister what action he intended to take with respect to the very desperate straits in which tobacco producers were and are finding themselves. The minister answered:

The member knows that we are moving on this file and that we will get the job done. He should stay tuned.

That was some seven weeks ago and nothing of substance has been done for the 1,500 quota owners who are facing very difficult times.

It is important to note that this is not simply a bail out of yet another sector which is facing difficulty. Tobacco producers are in a unique situation and the minister, his parliamentary secretary and members of the agriculture and agri-food committee know that.

It is not just about the high Canadian dollar. Everybody is facing the high Canadian dollars. It is not just the pressure from global competitors because many are facing that type of pressure.

The reality is that almost 40% of tobacco consumed in Canada is contraband. No other commodity is facing pressure from such an illegal competitor. Forty per cent is contraband tobacco, which is what, in and of itself, makes the situation of tobacco producers unique, and the minister knows that.

How disappointed, how shocked, frankly, the tobacco producers were when there was nothing in the budget of the Minister of Finance to assist them. Expectations had been raised and hopes certainly had been fueled but to this point nothing whatsoever has been done for this sector.

The average age of tobacco farmers is 58. They were so upset as a result of a conference call on Monday of last week that 150 of them descended en masse at the office of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in whose riding most of the tobacco farmers live but do not work. Hardly any work, frankly. They were so upset that they remained.

Adjournment Proceedings

Local media in my riding and in neighbouring ridings have taken up the cause, particularly, a journalist named Michael-Allan Marion, who writes for the *Expositor*, a daily in my riding. Mr. Marion has been articulate and relentless in his coverage of this issue in his desire, felt by constituents, by readership, that something be done for tobacco producers.

I ask the parliamentary secretary today to explain, if he can, what the minister meant when he said on February 14, “The member knows that we are moving on this file and that we will get the job done. He should stay tuned”.

I have stayed tuned, tobacco farmers have stayed tuned and the channel must be changed. There is nothing on the screen. What is on the horizon for tobacco producers?

● (1910)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for bringing up this extremely serious issue today. As the member knows, this issue has been around for quite some time. As a matter of fact, it goes back to the days when his party was in power. The member knows that his party failed tobacco farmers throughout 13 long years.

Last week, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food met with MPs from southwestern Ontario and the Ontario minister of agriculture, as well as tobacco growers and manufacturers, to discuss the issues facing the tobacco industry. The Minister of Agriculture remains committed to working with all stakeholders to find a workable way forward.

We will continue to work closely with tobacco growers to find ways to make existing programs work for their industry. When the pork and beef industry was going through its recent hard times, we sat down with industry representatives and worked out a solution that worked for everyone.

That is what I like about the minister. When he is confronted with a problem in a different sector of agriculture, he meets with the representatives and they work out a solution collectively. I would encourage the tobacco marketing board to work with us and the minister and to do the same.

The issues facing tobacco growers are not new. The member opposite knows that well, as he was part of a government that did not get the job done during 13 long years.

Let me give an example of how this government and this minister are taking steps to help find a workable way forward.

At a meeting with local members of Parliament and mayors, the Minister of Agriculture initiated an important dialogue to look at assistance for communities that are now dealing with the tobacco issue. The member for Elgin—Middlesex—London has agreed to chair a task force of municipal leaders to identify existing programs that can provide support and to help these communities access that assistance.

By the way, I really want to thank the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London for agreeing to take on that responsibility. He

too has worked tirelessly on this issue for the producers in his riding. This new task force represents real action and progress for the areas affected by this longstanding issue.

You do not have to believe me, Mr. Speaker. Let us hear from one of the local municipal leaders who will play an important role in this task force. The mayor of Norfolk, Dennis Travale, said the federal government has “come to the table and assist[ed] us with a strategic plan to help our economic revival”. The mayor of Norfolk is happy with our discussions and they will continue.

After 13 years of broken promises from the party opposite, we will continue to work to find a way forward with the industry and affected communities.

● (1915)

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Then, Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary and the minister should contact the mayors of Delhi and Tillsonburg to get their take on the non-action—and there is no lesser word—and the absolute absence of responsibility taken by the government for tobacco producers. Those are towns that have been decimated because of the difficulty confronting tobacco producers.

The farmers themselves and nearby communities have been devastated by the government's non-action, a government that has been in power now for over 26 months. For tobacco producers, these issues are not new, that is true, but the question remains then: why has it taken over 26 months for the government to do anything?

What we hear today from the parliamentary secretary is that dialogue has been initiated. He has not been listening perhaps, because the dialogue has been ongoing, except that it has been ongoing from one side—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, after failing to get the job done for the last 13 long years, it is surprising to hear a member from the Liberal Party speak out on this issue. Liberals should be embarrassed. As on so many other issues, the Liberals failed to deliver for Canadian farmers for 13 long years. They just did not get it done.

I am pleased that the Minister of Agriculture has announced this new task force, which will work to find existing programs and help affected communities access that assistance. I am also pleased to see that the task force has been embraced by municipal leaders such as the mayor of Norfolk, Dennis Travale.

The minister remains committed to work within existing programs to find a workable way forward. After 13 long years of inaction on this issue, affected communities can be assured that we are working with them to find a path forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:17 p.m.)

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