



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 066 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 13, 2008

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 13, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)
[English]

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service public reports for 2005-06 and 2006-07.

These reports provide an overview of the global threat environment and the efforts made by CSIS to ensure national security. The government's most important duty is the safety of all Canadians. These reports also send a clear message that the Government of Canada is committed to security, as well as transparency and accountability.

* * *

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 three petitions.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34 (1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, three reports from the Canadian branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association concerning the 53rd Commonwealth parliamentary conference held in New Delhi, India, from September 21 to 30, 2007; the 19th Commonwealth parliamentary seminar, held in Edinburgh, Scotland, from October 28 to November 3, 2007; and the CPA U.K. branch seminar on climate change held in London, United Kingdom, from November 26 to 30, 2007.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to a study on assistance for the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on spousal sponsorship and removal. Also attached is a dissenting report.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in relation to the review of the witness protection program.

* * *

•(1005)

ORGAN DONOR REGISTRY ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-527, An Act to establish a National Organ Donor Registry and to coordinate and promote organ donation throughout Canada.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure on this World Kidney Day to introduce an act to establish a national organ donor registry and to coordinate and promote organ donation throughout Canada.

The bill is intended to save lives by ensuring that Canadians in need of life-saving organs can benefit from the most efficient and coordinated system of identifying and matching donors to meet the needs.

We are painfully aware of the urgent need to improve our organ donation system. More than 4,000 Canadians are currently awaiting an organ transplant. One hundred and forty-six Canadians died in 2007 while awaiting for an organ. Of the 242 who died while waiting the year before, 73 were waiting for a kidney.

It is my belief and the belief of many others that we can benefit from this kind of legislation. It can make a difference in the lives of Canadians who are desperately in need of organs today.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-528, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (judicial discretion).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a relatively simple and straightforward bill. It would have the effect of reintroducing judicial discretion into the Criminal Code no matter what other clauses there may be in the code with regard to mandatory minimums.

The clause, no creativity here on my part, is very similar to the clause that is in the system in England. It has worked extremely well for those in England where the legislature determines what mandatory minimums should be, but in those extreme, unusual, human conditions where there needs to be some flexibility, it allows that to the judiciary.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

ABOLITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions.

The first petition is from constituents and Canadians from coast to coast who call upon the government to reinvigorate its support for the anti-nuclear movement and asks that the government actually establish itself as a global peace-builder that will call on and recommit our nation to the abolition of nuclear weapons as a top priority.

FOOD ADDITIVES

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from constituents and Canadians calling upon the government to prohibit the use of hormones, antibiotics, rendered slaughterhouse waste, genetically modified organisms and pesticides in food production.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the opportunity and privilege to present two petitions calling upon the government and the House of Commons to move swiftly to enact legislation or remove legislation that would require long guns to continue to be registered.

The petitioners call upon the government and the House of Commons to consider that the majority of crimes are not committed by long guns but rather by other types of guns that otherwise would be registered and really illegal firearms. They call upon us as members of Parliament to consider that the cost has not done anything to improve safety in Canada.

I have the privilege of presenting these thousands of names from constituents from the Peace River constituency.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have hundreds of names submitted to me on the subject of human trafficking.

The petitioners are asking that the government continue its good work on stopping the horrendous crime of human trafficking across Canada.

● (1010)

AGE OF CONSENT

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know we have passed Bill C-2 but I have some petitions that just arrived in my office concerning raising the age of consent from 14 to 16 years of age and I would respectfully submit those as well.

SRI LANKA

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I would like to present a petition signed by 83 constituents from my riding of Etobicoke Centre.

Last November, the designated peace negotiator for the Tamil side, Mr. Thamilselvan, was killed by a targeted Sri Lankan air strike. Since then, the Sri Lankan government has officially rescinded its support for the peace process and Sri Lanka has descended into even greater violence and a more furious civil war.

The petitioners urge the Prime Minister to demonstrate leadership by engaging in multilateral diplomatic efforts to help ensure the success of a ceasefire and peace negotiations in war-ravaged Sri Lanka.

Let Canada be at the forefront of making the case for peace.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions.

The first petition has been signed by thousands of Torontonians who are very concerned that stray bullets, like the one that killed Mr. John O'Keefe, on Saturday, January 12 on Yonge Street as he was walking down the street and, five days later, another stray bullet that killed Mr. Mao while he was stacking oranges outside a grocery store where he worked.

The petitioners are concerned about these innocent victims of gun violence and call upon Parliament to ensure there is a federal ban on the ownership of handguns and that 2,500 new police officers will be hired to make the streets safer.

The petitioners also feel that we need to strengthen Canada's witness protection program to ensure members of the community, especially young people, will more readily come forward with information they have about handgun crimes in the neighbourhoods.

The petitioners believe that long term, stable funding for successful youth safety crime prevention programs is important.

They are also asking that we hold a Canada-U.S. summit of lawmakers and law enforcement personnel from all levels of government, along with stakeholders, to tackle the ongoing crisis of illegal handguns being smuggled into Canada.

UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from Canadians who are concerned about the 200,000 undocumented workers and their families.

The petitioners are asking that the Government of Canada stop deportations while the new immigration policy is being put in place. They ask that the Government of Canada establish an in-Canada program to offer work permits to law-abiding workers and their families, and that the Government of Canada create a long term solution for a fair program.

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of a number of Canadians, particularly from the city of Peterborough, Ontario, who remember the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud was a promise not kept.

The petitioners would remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts but he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$21 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

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

BILL C-484

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, petitions keep roaring into this place in support of my bill, Bill C-484.

Thousands of petitioners believe that if a woman is purposefully pregnant and wants to have her child, she deserves the right of the law to protect that unborn child. They ask that we in this Parliament produce legislation to that effect, and, of course, my Bill C-484 would do that.

This is another group of some 800 petitioners, which brings the total number now that I have presented to over 10,000.

* * *

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.

• (1015)

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed from March 11 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: When debate last ended on this motion, the hon. member for Calgary West had the floor, but at this point we shall proceed to resuming debate and I recognize the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to say that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Wetaskiwin.

It is with great honour that I rise today to take part in the debate on the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. I take part in the debate, solemnly acknowledging the sacrifices our soldiers make each day in Afghanistan and the extended mission we are asking them to take on.

Canada has lost some of its bravest soldiers during this mission and I feel it is ever more important that we keep their ultimate sacrifices in mind as we consider the motion.

I will be supporting the motion before us today. I note that the motion expressly states that this House believes that Canada must remain committed to the people of Afghanistan beyond February 2009.

It is this statement that appeals to the hearts and minds of Canadians by committing Canada to upholding the very rights and freedoms we cherish. It is this statement that I feel echoes the sentiments expressed by a great Canadian leader who is recognized, among many things, for his pursuit of basic human rights for all people.

While introducing Canada's Bill of Rights in 1960, former Prime Minister the right hon. John Diefenbaker said:

I am a Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, or free to choose those who shall govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind.

The right hon. John Diefenbaker was committed to ensuring men and women, regardless of age, sex or ethnicity, were free. He was also committed to ensuring that these rights existed for all people, not just Canadians.

I believe his declaration of rights and freedoms epitomizes what Canada has stood for throughout history and continues to stand for today.

Government Orders

From World War II, when we liberated Holland of its Nazi oppressors, to the Korean War, where we stood firm to halt the aggression from the north and maintain peace, and to the current mission in Afghanistan, Canada has been a beacon of hope to millions of people. Throughout it all, we have fought to uphold the rights and freedoms of all people.

It was never a question of whether it was worth it. It was never a question of value. Canada took on these dangerous missions because it was the right thing to do. That is why I am disappointed when I hear members questioning why we are currently in Afghanistan, members questioning the value of this mission.

I was extremely disappointed when I heard the hon. member for Vancouver East, during the debate on Monday, ridicule the Conservative position that Canada is in Afghanistan to defend democracy.

What appalls me is that she made this misinformed statement mere days after six female members of Afghanistan's national assembly visited Canada, and not only thanked Canada for its humanitarian and peacekeeping assistance but urged Canada to continue its efforts to ensure that democracy would survive.

If the hon. member for Vancouver East will not take the government at its word, I hope she will at least acknowledge the legitimate appeals from a female member of Afghanistan's national assembly.

The NDP and the Bloc would have us pull our troops out and leave that country to stand on its own. However, I am grateful that our government and the official opposition believe that it is fundamentally important to ensure the rights and freedoms of all people are protected, including those outside of Canada.

We understand that this cannot be done solely by holding peace rallies and making lofty proclamations. At times, protecting lives requires using force. At times, supporting the quest for freedom, rights, democracy and equality requires intervention and sacrifice.

It is at these times that Canada has always led by example, and our brave men and women in the armed forces have shown exemplary courage.

I would like to move on to an important issue that personally impacts me. March 8 was International Women's Day. I feel it is only fitting, as a female member of Parliament, that I address the inroads that we have made in Afghanistan with respect to women's rights.

I am pleased that Canada is developing a local, field-managed, rapid response fund to help reduce discrimination against women and girls. This initiative will allow for more and more Afghani women to participate in the Afghani society.

It is also important to note that Canada's government has made it a priority to support projects for women in three primary areas: economic empowerment, access to education, and the legal protection of women's rights.

● (1020)

Since 2006 Canada has invested \$13 million in the micro finance investment support facility, making it the largest donor. This program provides small loans and financial services to impoverished

Afghans to start new businesses, and buy land and animals to support themselves.

What is so important about this particular micro finance program is that more than two-thirds of its clients are women who are being given the opportunity to participate equally in their society. This is astounding progress in a country that under the previous brutal regime prevented women from participating in society and denied them their basic human rights.

I have spoken at length about human rights and women's rights. I would like to speak about one of the most heinous abuses of human rights affecting Afghan women and children today, and that is human trafficking. This is an issue that I have passionately raised many times in the House.

Afghan children are trafficked internally as well as to Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Zimbabwe for commercial sexual exploitation, forced into marriage to settle debts or disputes, forced into begging and debt bondage, serve as child soldiers, or other forms of involuntary servitude. Afghan women are trafficked internally, and to Pakistan and Iran for commercial sexual exploitation. Men are trafficked to Iran for forced labour.

This is something that our government is addressing in Afghanistan. We are working to confront the poverty and underlying issues that cause human trafficking through our development aid programs.

It is important to remember we are in Afghanistan at the request of the Afghans themselves who have suffered decades of oppression and poverty. The values we hold dearly as Canadians, freedom, democracy and human rights, urge us to respond. That is why we must stay. There is much work to be done, especially in regard to human trafficking.

According to the U.S. trafficking in persons report, the government of Afghanistan has yet to meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. However, it is making a significant effort to do so. The Afghan government has been developing legislation to fight human trafficking over the past year.

Canada is playing a key part in helping Afghanistan develop its judicial system. We are currently helping to reform the Afghan justice system to promote human rights and protect its citizens. We have supported skills development in the Afghan supreme court, attorneys office, and the ministry of justice. We cannot do this if we are disengaged from Afghanistan.

I also want to note that the government of Afghanistan has made modest improvements in its efforts to protect victims of trafficking. In March 2007 the government of Afghanistan provided land to the International Organization for Migration to build a shelter especially designed for child victims of trafficking.

During the past year Afghanistan also conducted a broad public awareness campaign to educate the public on the dangers of trafficking and the resources for assistance.

Government Orders

I strongly believe that Canada can continue to play a guiding role in helping Afghanistan combat human trafficking and the exploitation of women and children, especially through development and diplomacy.

As I mentioned before, the roots of human trafficking are found in inequality and poverty. Canada is working to put an end to these very evils in Afghanistan.

Canada has invested over \$50 million in the national solidarity program, which gives rural Afghans, especially women, the opportunity to have a voice in the development process. This process identifies community needs such as: safe drinking water and sanitation, transport, irrigation, electricity, education, health, public buildings, and improvements in agriculture.

These initiatives greatly help to eradicate the widespread poverty and inequality that contributes to the problem of human trafficking. Again, we cannot do this if we are not in Afghanistan.

Approximately a year ago, this very House unanimously passed my Motion No. 153 that called for the condemnation of the trafficking of women and children across international borders for the purpose of sexual exploitation. It called on the government to immediately adopt a comprehensive strategy to combat the trafficking of persons worldwide.

I would now ask that all members again unanimously support a motion that contains the same sentiments of combating human trafficking worldwide, in this case, in Afghanistan.

● (1025)

We want to continue in Afghanistan because it is the right thing to do. I know that all hon. members in this House are proud Canadians who are free to speak without fear, free to worship in their own way, free to stand up for what they think, free to oppose what they believe is wrong, and free to choose who governs their country.

I hope that they are also the type of Canadians who would pledge to uphold this heritage of freedom not just for themselves but for all of mankind by supporting this motion on Afghanistan that is before us today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member's speech. The Afghanistan issue is not an easy one. It is neither all black or all white. However, what is clear is that, from the beginning, any Canadian involvement has been improvised. The Minister of National Revenue, who was the national defence critic two years ago, asked the former government 16 questions about what should be considered for this mission's future. Since then, the new government has been unable to answer those questions.

I have a question for the member. This mission is unbalanced and we all acknowledge that Afghanistan needs diplomatic assistance from the international community. But in order to really support our troops, should we not end our offensive mission in Kandahar in February 2009, as the vast majority of Canadians and an even bigger majority of Quebecers are expecting?

It is very important to make the distinction between offensive military involvement in Kandahar and the involvement of NATO and

the international community in Afghanistan. Is it not just throwing the baby out with the bath water to lump all of that together and to want to continue an offensive war in which Canada has already done its part? Other countries could take its place in Kandahar.

Lastly, would the most responsible thing for Canada to do on the international scene not be to inform the international community that we will leave Kandahar in February 2009 and that we will no longer participate the current, aggressive military mission?

[*English*]

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the hon. member is saying, but I would agree to disagree. It is very hard to negotiate with terrorists. The Taliban was a brutal regime prior to the Canadian Forces going in. The Canadian Forces brought law and order.

The fact of the matter is that the guiding principles of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan has had three components, which the member knows: defence, diplomacy, and development. Those three components comprise the release of troops into Afghanistan to protect the people, the building of business with Afghanistan, and the diplomacy that we use to build the country. So, I would agree to disagree.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also listened to the member from Winnipeg and her speech today.

I met with the Afghan women parliamentarians that she spoke of in her speech and they told me that a week before they came here a woman was publicly stoned to death by her husband in Afghanistan. These kinds of abuses against women continue unabated.

In fact, they talked about the number of women who commit suicide in Afghanistan by setting themselves on fire. They talked about how forced marriages for young girls are still an ongoing practice. It is important to paint an accurate picture of what is happening in Afghanistan.

One said that when she was there after the fall of the Taliban, she could drive the highway to Kabul safely, and now, even though we have paved that road, she cannot drive on that road. She said that the Taliban shake down citizens in Kandahar at night and the police shake them down in the day time.

I would like to ask the member, exactly how does she advocate support for extending this war by three years when we cannot even get a cost assessment from the government on how much it is going to cost the Canadian taxpayer?

● (1030)

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, clearly I would have to agree to disagree on some of the comments the hon. member has made today. When the six female parliamentarians came to Canada from Afghanistan, they thanked Canada very strongly for its participation and asked that we continue to be involved and have our troops there to continue helping their country.

Canada is doing many things. Not only is it doing the defence part, but it also is helping Afghanistan develop its judicial system. In her speech, the member was talking about the women being stoned. That is reason why the troops are there: so these women can be protected, period.

Government Orders

The member for Vancouver East stated she was astounded that we are in Afghanistan because we are somehow defending democracy. Democracy is about the freedom of speech, the freedom of being able to start a business, and the freedom of being able to walk safely down the streets. That is why the troops need to be there. That is why we need to help build businesses. That is why we have to continue to build that country.

On this side of the House, we certainly agree to disagree.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with tremendous honour that I rise today in the House of Commons to debate Canada's continuing mission in Afghanistan.

Let me begin by recognizing the brave young men and women of the constituency of Wetaskiwin who have already served our country and who are currently serving with determination and pride in Afghanistan. Their courage and commitment deserve the respect and gratitude of our entire nation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the friends and families of these brave men and women who wait here at home for the return of their loved ones from a difficult and dangerous part of the world. They deserve nothing less than to be continually in our thoughts and prayers as they await the safe return of their loved ones.

I would also like to thank the Prime Minister for his leadership during this difficult time. His courage and dedication are an inspiration for our country and also for the world. I thank him for the consideration that he has shown for this Parliament by allowing Canada's participation in the mission in Afghanistan to be debated fully and completely.

This is the second time that our Parliament has been consulted on this most important issue during our Conservative minority government, a consideration that was not extended to Parliament under the previous governments, minority or majority.

In this motion, we are affirming our basic commitment to Afghanistan and to Kandahar in particular. We are also insisting that our men and women have the tools they need to get the job done.

Why are we in Afghanistan? I am often asked this question by constituents who are genuinely interested and concerned. My answer to them is simply that we are in Afghanistan because on September 11, 2001, many Canadians and our friend and neighbour were attacked by a regime that aided the worst terrorists the world has seen in 50 years. It killed thousands of innocent people. When those two towers fell, our hearts fell too. Thousands of Canadians came to Parliament Hill to express concern and support.

Those lessons from September 11 run deep, but quite simply, the idea that we can ignore what happens a world away is tragically naive. When countries fester under poverty and oppression and foster radical messages of hate, we can no longer assume that it will not affect us. In fact, the probable assumption is that the seeds of hate will find their way to our own backyards if we do not take decisive action. Our economy, our way of life and even our very lives are in jeopardy if we fail to recognize this fact.

Canada is in Afghanistan as part of the international effort requested by the democratically elected government of Afghanistan. As part of the United Nations mandated and NATO-led mission,

Canada, along with its international partners, made a commitment to help the people of Afghanistan build a stable, democratic and self-sufficient country. Our goal is to create a safer environment where development and reconstruction can take place and to help the Afghan people build a foundation for stability and lasting peace.

With more troops on the ground and with help from the Canadian provincial reconstruction teams, we will be better able to capture and hold a town or area and pursue robust development goals. For instance, whenever the provincial reconstruction teams build a bridge over a small body of water or a river or pave a stretch of highway that had been a dirt road, it makes harder for the Taliban to dig it up and plant explosives to kill innocent civilians and our men and women in uniform. More development does not just help Afghans; it helps keep our Canadians safe in those areas.

Traditional development work is also important. Since the fall of the Taliban there have been numerous successes, such as, for example, the vaccination of more than seven million children against polio, including approximately 350,000 in Kandahar province; the delivery of food aid to more than 400,000 people in Kandahar province in 2007; and now, 83% of Afghans have access to basic medical care compared to 9% in 2004.

We also had success in helping to grow the Afghan economy, which is of course our long term goal. Per capita income has doubled between 2004 and 2007, a good indicator by all means.

Only five years ago under the brutal Taliban regime, Afghan women had no place or voice in public life. Last week something quite remarkable happened here on Parliament Hill. There was little fanfare, but the event was significant nonetheless. A group of Afghan women were here visiting Ottawa and these women were not just ordinary Afghans. Rather, they are quite remarkable and extraordinary women. They are elected parliamentarians.

Under the Taliban rule, women and girls were not allowed to be educated or even to work. Now women sit on many community development councils across the country, where they have a say in how their communities are run.

• (1035)

In their book *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang explained what life was like for women under the Taliban extremists. I have an excerpt from this work. It states:

Government Orders

For the women of Afghanistan, a long, dark night had begun. Laws were passed forcing women to wear burqas in public, and they were beaten if they dressed "immodestly," if an ankle showed beneath a skirt. They were denied education, and were forbidden to work outside the home. Some women were stoned to death for alleged sexual misconduct. Women in the cities were especially hard hit, as they were more likely to be educated and to work outside their home. Families were reduced to starvation because women were forced to stay at home, and many neighbourhood clinics and schools closed. Forty percent of the doctors, about half the civil service, and approximately seventy percent of teachers were women. Children were forbidden to sing and to play music, and were not allowed to do what Afghans have done for as long as they can remember: They were not allowed to fly their kites.

That is a pretty powerful statement, but life is better now. Canada's education-related support has focused on girls and now more than two million Afghan girls are in school, many of them for the first time in their lives. The girls primary education project aims to establish up to 4,000 community based schools and after school learning programs and will provide training for 9,000 new teachers, 4,000 of whom are women.

The integrating women into markets program is allowing 1,500 women to develop horticultural operations. Canada is the top donor to the microfinance investment support facility, or MISFA, as one of the world's largest microfinance programs. The repayment rate of these small loans is over 90%. That is an incredible repayment rate, enviable I think anywhere.

Canada is providing small loans and financial services to poor Afghans to start new businesses and to buy land and animals to better support themselves and their families. Since April 2006, \$13 million has been given across 23 provinces, including Kandahar, and more than two-thirds of the clients are women.

This motion is not a Liberal or a Conservative motion. It is a Canadian motion. It is based on Canadian values of peace, order and good government. It will allow others less fortunate than us to enjoy the bounties and joys of these ideals.

Sometimes these ideals require the sacrifice of brave men and women. We hope not, but we cannot bury our heads in the sand and deny that reality. We had to defend these ideals in two world wars, in Korea and in the former Yugoslavia, and today we are defending them again in Afghanistan.

I urge all members to support this Canadian motion, not just for the people of Afghanistan but for who we are as Canadians and who I hope we will always be. We must see this mission through. Canada has invested too much in the lives of our servicemen and servicewomen and in investments in aid and development.

We accepted the responsibility for Kandahar and we entrusted that responsibility to our soldiers, our development workers and our diplomats. They need to know that there is determination at the leadership level to see this mission through.

We told our allies that we would be there, that they could depend on us, and we told the men, women and children of Afghanistan that we would not abandon them to the fate of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. To that, Canada must hold true.

•(1040)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by my colleague down the way. I have been listening carefully to the government's and Liberals' support of the extension of the mission. To be clear about my party's position, it

is not to abandon Afghanistan, as they will have everyone believe, but how to do things differently.

What is occurring now is clearly not working. On the extension of the war, as the government and Liberals believe, in a nutshell, it is that we add 1,000 troops, some helicopters and drones and that will take care of the problem. This is not credible when we listen to testimony by generals who say 1,000 troops will not do it. They want more and more and that will increase the conflict.

If my colleague truly believes that Canada is there to make a difference, then can he at least acknowledge the fact that right now civilian deaths are up, security is down and Afghanistan has one of the most corrupt regimes around? That is not dealt with.

Finally, will he at least acknowledge, as some of his colleagues will not, that there are negotiations going on right now with the Taliban, and they have been for quite a long time, negotiations with the Taliban that everyone says we should never negotiate with?

It is time to take off the ideological blinkers and acknowledge that if this is not working, it is time to do something else.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of the question on some certain grounds. The member asks me if I believe the addition of the troops and the equipment will make a difference. Of course it will make a difference.

As a matter of fact, I just got back from the NATO parliamentary trip to the joint forces command in Brunssum at NATO headquarters, where we sat down with the North Atlantic Council and had some pretty frank discussions at the political level. What I found was that parliamentarians from all 26 allied countries were actually quite supportive of Canada's position insofar as asking for more help in Kandahar.

When it comes to discussing the issues pertaining to security, the more men and women we have on the ground and the better equipment we have for reconnaissance are obviously going to make a difference. That is the difference that we need to make before more development can be done and before more aid can be given. It has to be done in a secure environment.

Pulling back or changing the colour of our helmets is not going to make a difference at all, as the member for Ottawa Centre suggests. All it will do is simply make them feel better about the fact that Canada is in a difficult situation.

Pulling out is not an option either. There has been a lot of discussion about whether or not Canada's mission should change or whether we should rotate out. I asked that question very specifically. After the amount of time that Canada has spent in Kandahar, the relationships we have built and the time that has been invested, to rotate out of Kandahar and let somebody else do the work would simply be a travesty.

It would be one of the worst things we could do in denying the sacrifices that have already been made by our men and women in Kandahar. We must stick to our principles, our goals and our values and ensure that this mission succeeds in Kandahar.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there was an error in my colleague's speech. The last time Parliament made a decision about this issue, it decided to extend the mission until 2009. The member says that we cannot withdraw from Afghanistan now because Canada committed to being there until February 2009, by which time we will have fulfilled our obligation and done exactly what we told the international community we would do.

I had the impression I was listening to an American general in Vietnam in the mid-1960s, a few years before the Americans were forced to leave Vietnam following their humiliating defeat. They believed that more soldiers and a bigger military budget would solve the problem.

We have to wonder about this, and wondering about it does not make one a bad citizen. Has Canada not done its part? Can NATO not continue the mission? Are there not other contributions we can make in terms of diplomacy and international cooperation?

I believe that we have done our part and played our role in the combat mission.

• (1045)

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I disagree. First, let me be very clear. I am not an American general. The principles are very clear. Either we believe, as a NATO ally, a country and a member of the United Nations, which has sanctioned this mission, that we can actually make a difference in Afghanistan, or we do not.

I believe, as I believe many of my colleagues here do, and as I know the brave men and women who continue to serve not only in our Canadian armed forces but also in our diplomatic and development efforts also believe, that there is something there that is worth fighting for. I will continue to support this mission as long as it has that support.

Let me be very clear on this, as the Prime Minister has been: those conditions that were laid out in the Manley report must be met. We need those thousand troops. We need that equipment. If we get that, and if our allies come through for us, as I am relatively confident they will, I believe we should continue that mission. However, we will pull out if those conditions are not met, and the Prime Minister has been very clear.

I am very hopeful and very optimistic. I appreciate the support of the Liberal Party, which has finally come around to an agreement on this motion. As the two parties that traditionally have been responsible for governing this great country, we have an international responsibility.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to rise in the chamber and speak on this motion from the perspective that we in the NDP bring without feeling a significant degree of anger, quite frankly, over the position Canada finds itself in at the present time, and with a great deal of frustration.

What it comes down to, in my opinion, is the incredible naïveté that I am seeing from both the government side and the official

opposition side in support of the motion before us today. One wants to cry out, "Have we learned nothing from history?"

Have we forgotten the lessons? Let me be very specific. Have we forgotten the lessons of Vietnam? Have we forgotten the lessons of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan? Or we could go back historically to the British experience in Afghanistan, or all the way back to Alexander the Great's experience in Afghanistan, literally thousands of years ago.

When we see this motion and we see the support coming from both the government side and the official opposition side, the answer obviously has to be no, we have not learned anything, because we seem to be bound and determined to repeat the same mistakes.

We know, and there is no dispute on this, that we went into this combat mission with our eyes firmly closed or our heads looking in the wrong direction. There is no other explanation. That was under a former administration, not the current one, although with the support of the official opposition at that time.

We, the country and this legislature, were told at that time that this was really following Canada's traditional role, a role, quite frankly, that Canada more than any other country in the world developed, starting back in Suez in the 1950s and for any number of times since then, a role of using our military personnel and our other resources as a nation to promote peace. That in fact has turned out to be a lie.

That is not what we started doing in Afghanistan and it is certainly not what we continued to do in 2003 and in 2005 as we ramped up our involvement. That involvement, we have to be very clear, has been grossly weighted to a military combat role. It is undisputed by everybody in this House that nine out of every ten dollars we are spending in Afghanistan are being spent on the military side—

An hon. member: It might even be higher.

Mr. Joe Comartin: It may in fact be higher, and all of our personnel are geared toward the combat role.

I want to say just as an aside that one of the troubling things, and one of the things that makes me angry, is that we hear from the Conservatives in particular that we have something to prove as a country. Again, have we learned nothing from our history?

We proved that at Vimy. We proved that in Italy in the second world war. We proved it on the beaches of Normandy in the second world war. We can go down the list. Canada and our military personnel have nothing to prove to the world and it is an insult to the reputation of our military personnel to hear those kinds of comments, to hear that we have something to prove. We do not.

• (1050)

I do not know what it is about Canadian people, but when it is necessary, we step up. I have never quite understood that and I have studied it a lot, but that in fact is the reality. But that is not the factual situation we are dealing with in Afghanistan.

Government Orders

Other than, arguably, the Boer War back in the late 1800s, Canada has never been involved in an imperialist action, in occupying another country. We might ask, what about the first world war, when we were in Europe? What about the second world war? The significant difference between those and even the Korean war is that the areas we were in during those wars were areas where the people who lived in those areas wanted us to be there. We were in fact liberators. We were not occupiers.

It is quite obvious from the resistance and the insurgents that we are battling in Kandahar and in the south of Afghanistan that this it is not the case in Afghanistan.

Let me go back to the naïveté. We hear members on both sides of the House who are in support of this motion saying that we have to stay there, that “we have to stay there because”, and then they go through all of the tragic realities of Afghanistan. What it says to me, again, is that they should listen to themselves, that they should listen to what they are saying and then go back and look at what was being said in those few months before the Americans pulled out of Vietnam, in those few months before the Russians were forced to pull out of Afghanistan.

They should look at the quotes, whether they were from our military leaders, political people at the time or people on the ground. Always what we heard was, “We are just about there, we are just about to win it, and we just need to escalate a little bit more, so give us this”. Of course we know that did not happen in those cases.

If we move beyond those more well-known conflicts, there were any number of other times, and I particularly urge people to look at the number of insurgencies that were fought from the second world war on. The same thing happened in almost every single one of them. There is a lot of documentation on this. This is not something I am making up. It is not just my own observations and opinion.

In the vast majority of insurgencies being combated, that combat has been unsuccessful, in way over 75% of them. We are approaching 90% that have been unsuccessfully combated by using conventional military methodology, the same methodology that this motion would compel us to follow for the next three years. It failed in almost 90% of the cases.

We might ask, what about the 10%? Is this one of those where we are going to be successful? The reality is that when one looks at all of the objective evidence, it in fact is getting worse in Afghanistan.

The greatest military force in the history of the world, in the form of the United States, and the greatest military alliance in the history of the world, in the form of NATO, have been fighting in Afghanistan for seven years now, longer than the second world war and much longer than the first world war. The situation is worse today than it was when the initial invasion of Afghanistan occurred seven years ago.

An hon. member: That's ridiculous.

Mr. Joe Comartin: We can hear the Conservative side saying that is ridiculous, and they are ridiculing me. But it is the truth. That is the reality today. It has been seven years, with the greatest military power in the history of the world, the greatest military alliance in the history of the world, and the situation from a military standpoint,

from a security standpoint, is worse today than it was seven years ago.

● (1055)

There is a lot of naïveté. We hear mostly from the Conservatives in this debate, and we heard it again from the last speaker in response to a question, that our allies love us being there. Absolutely they love us being there because it is our soldiers who are dying, not theirs. They are dying at a much higher rate than American soldiers.

We went into this mission with our eyes closed. Our NATO allies did not. New Zealand, Australia, France, Germany, and I could go down the list of 20-odd countries in NATO, all refused to take on this combat mission. They knew what the consequences would be. To be blunt, and perhaps rude and undiplomatic, they were quite happy to let Canada go into Afghanistan. They encouraged us.

I can remember having debates with some of our allies' ambassadors. They said that Canada should stay there; Canada should ramp up; Canada should do more. When I asked them if they were going to do that, if they were going to lift the caveats, if they were going to send their soldiers into the real combat zones, often there would be no answer because of embarrassment, or they would indicate that was not their government's policy.

I want to go down a list of just how naive we were. I accuse some of our military leadership in this regard as well. It is not just our political leadership.

When we sent our soldiers into Afghanistan they were not wearing the right uniforms. They did not have the proper communications equipment. I do not want to say anything bad about our people on the ground because they have done an absolutely amazing job given the circumstances that we, as political leaders, put them in. We did not give them the communications equipment they required and at times they could not even communicate with our allies in the field. The LAVs that we initially gave them were clearly insufficient for the circumstances.

We, the military leadership and the political leadership, had not done any analysis of what we would be faced with there. We ramped up and moved in our tanks, and if this motion passes, we will be moving in helicopters, and frankly, the next thing will be fighter jets. I do not know what will be moved in after that. Will we move in more soldiers? We saw how successful that was with the Russians. Estimates indicate that if it is soldiers that are needed, we may need as many as 400,000 soldiers. Canada has roughly 50,000 to 60,000 in total at best, at any given time, and hardly any of them are engaged in the combat mission.

Where is the leadership? Is the government prepared to continue? We have lost 80 soldiers. How many more have to die? Can anybody in this House seriously and honestly in good conscience and good faith say that by 2011 it will be any different? In that period of time, how many more soldiers are we going to lose? I do not believe that anybody can honestly stand in this House and say that, and those who do are deceiving themselves.

Over the past seven years the situation has deteriorated. It has become worse and there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that in the next three years it will get any better.

Government Orders

•(1100)

We hear that we are doing things better for the people of Afghanistan. It is not true. It can be put as simply as that. It is not true. There are food shortages. There is an increase in the drug trade. There has been no significant improvement in the quality of life for the vast majority of people in that country.

There is a central government that arguably controls Kabul, maybe. The suicide bombings have increased there in the last few months. The number of deaths has increased in Kabul in the last few months. At best the central government is controlling no more than 10% of the country, and that is the government Canada is supporting. In the rest of the country, especially in the south, there is no control of anyone, including ourselves. In the east there is hardly any control. The north is controlled by factions, militias and warlords who continue to perpetuate the situation that was there before we went in.

Later today we have to vote on this motion. I have seen absolutely no evidence that would make me conclude that the decision should be an affirmative one on this motion. The NDP has set out the terms of a safe withdrawal of our troops with our continued involvement in Afghanistan. We are not going away. There is Canada's involvement both at the diplomatic level and in the aid area to assist at this point. This is where our strengths are. We believe in assisting in getting some peaceful resolution.

Naiveté is what is always thrown at the NDP. The reality is that we look at what has occurred. There has been a large number of deaths—and I am not speaking of Canadian deaths at this point, although those are tragic enough—I am talking about the thousands and thousands of deaths in Afghanistan as a result of the chaos. Will that continue to some degree? We know that some of it will.

It is my firm belief that if the resolution that is contained in the amendment proposed by the NDP is followed, the consequences will be less severe. There is no question that there will be consequences. The consequences that will flow from our continued involvement in the combat mission and our continued involvement in a course of conduct that leads us nowhere other than to greater chaos will be more deaths and greater destruction in Afghanistan. Therefore, it seems to me that the path set out by the NDP is clear and one which I would urge all members of this House to follow.

•(1105)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. I might ask members to notice that there are many members rising to ask questions of the member for Windsor—Tecumseh. Hopefully the questions and comments can be brief and we can get as many people in as possible.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member for Windsor—Tecumseh. He said at the beginning that he was almost angry about having to participate in the debate. He called the position of the Conservative Party and the position of the Liberals who have come to a measure of consensus about extending the mission naive. He went all the way back to Alexander the Great. Maybe the member who calls us naive might recognize that the world is different from what it was then.

The member had the audacity to call our Canadian Forces occupiers in Afghanistan. Has the member forgotten that we are there at the invitation of the legitimate government of Afghanistan? We are part of a UN mandated mission that is NATO supported and delivered by a coalition of about 30 nations. How dare he call our forces occupiers.

Does the member recognize that Canada has paid a price to make a difference? This government did not choose Kandahar. The previous Liberal government chose Kandahar. It was a difficult assignment because the south is vulnerable. That is the main access route that the insurgents like to use. Canada has taken on a tough assignment. We have lost troops in the course of providing security. There is almost no combat going on currently, thank goodness, because of the great and valiant effort of our security forces. The recent deaths are almost all due to IEDs or suicide bombers. There has been a tremendous difference there.

Does the member not recognize the tremendous difference? Would he have us pull out of Kandahar and go to another region where it might be safe? We have paid a tremendous price to establish relationships with security officials in Kandahar, with the police, in training courts and judges. We know the terrain in Kandahar better than any other nation. Our troops have paid the price to gain that knowledge and to gain the trust of the local people. Is he willing to throw aside all the sacrifices—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the world has changed since Alexander the Great. I do not think the Conservative government has seen that. It believes still that the traditional combat role is the methodology to deal with this insurgency.

I will move forward a bit in history and mention the second world war. When our troops went into Italy, they actually had some pretty poor leadership and they had been given very little resources. They were not fighting the Italian population, but the German forces. The Canadian Forces were able to develop techniques at the captain and major rank on down. They dealt with the situation, which was a unique one at the time in terms of the way the Germans were defending. We were able to do that. We dealt with a new set of circumstances. We did not do what we are doing in Afghanistan, which is using the same kind of combat military approach that does not work when we are dealing with that kind of insurgency.

With regard to the hon. member's question about occupation, the key here is how do the people in the Kandahar region see us? They see us as occupiers.

•(1110)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh will know the high regard in which we hold him, so I rise only because I was surprised by some of the things he had to say, since I always associate his contributions in committee and in the House with wisdom.

Government Orders

I did want to put one simple question to him. His party keeps saying we are not going to abandon Afghanistan and the Afghan people. I was in Afghanistan three weeks ago. What would the hon. member say to the Afghan people, particularly the women I met, who said to a woman, and the men to a man, “Do not abandon us. Maintain a security presence. We will not last five minutes if you leave us. The Taliban will take over”.

I do not like the facts we face in Afghanistan any more than the hon. member does, but I do want a policy in Canada that meets the test of fidelity to the people to whom we have given our word.

I ask the hon. member in all seriousness how he can stand in the House and maintain that he wants to keep faith with the Afghan people and the people who want us to stay by withdrawing the security component on which their very lives depend? Can he stand in this House and explain what he would say to the Afghan women who said to me, “Do not abandon us. Maintain a security presence in Kandahar”?

Mr. Joe Comartin: It is a conundrum, Mr. Speaker. The more appropriate question would be, is it going to make any difference if we stay? Will it make any difference if we stay there? That is the question. Has it up to this point? The answer is obviously no, it has not.

Every independent analysis of what is going on in Afghanistan is that the situation is deteriorating. We could go through every single independent analysis. There is not one that says it is getting better. Are we going to see those same people who are asking for us to provide that security?

Let me go on a different tangent. Both the U.K. and the Americans have to be heavily criticized for their very direct refusal to engage in negotiations, to force negotiations. When some have been attempted, they have been very limited, very weak in their support, but that is the route we have to go.

We have said very clearly, it is right there in the wording of our motion, that we take our troops out safely. That will take some time. We recognize that.

It is very clear that if we continue the combat mission, it will not do anything to provide additional security. It will simply escalate the fighting. It will escalate the number of deaths.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do have great personal respect for the hon. member. As the other member mentioned, he generally has words of wisdom. However, I would like to pick up on a couple of things that he said.

He cited great names in Canadian and military history, Vimy, Italy, and Normandy, and said that we had done the right thing in the past. Yes, we have, but now he seems to be suggesting that we should stop doing the right thing today simply because we have done the right thing in the past. That is pretty illogical.

Canada is the kind of country that continues to do the right thing because it is simply the right thing to do and that is who we are.

He expresses surprise that Canadians always step up when it is necessary. Again, I find it a little bit odd that he would be surprised

when the people of Canada step up when it is necessary to do so. That, again, is who we are.

Given the NDP's history and approach to world affairs, I am not surprised that he would be surprised at that. That makes the point of why the NDP differs so greatly in its approach to world affairs than the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party of Canada, both of whom have led Canada through periods of conflict very successfully with allies for the right reasons and accomplished the right things.

I have two quick questions for the hon. member.

● (1115)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will not have any chance to respond, so I will go to the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, just quickly I will tell the member why I am so passionate and feel so strongly about this. It is because of where I come from and where I saw political decisions made during the second world war at Dieppe where we lost 950 of our personnel in that raid. The reason we were there had nothing to do with good military tactics or the skill and the heroism of our people. It had everything to do with that kind of a political decision, and that is mostly what is going on here.

We are in Afghanistan because the Americans want us in Afghanistan. We are fighting in Afghanistan because our allies will not. That is the lesson we should be learning from Afghanistan.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the House today to a very important motion on a very complex issue, a motion discussing a region of tremendous instability.

I am speaking late in the debate and many of the comments will have been made by others before, but it is important that I be on the record and that I speak to the motion.

The motion, which is a lengthy one, reflects the complexity of the situation in Afghanistan as we know it today, its past histories and, most important, its future course.

In speaking to the motion, I need to comment that it reflects the concerns of many in the Liberal caucus and I am pleased that the government has, in putting forth the motion, agreed in theory to many of the positions put forward by the leader of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with my colleague from St. Boniface.

In speaking to the motion, my questions relate more to the implementation of the real intent of the motion and the need for me to have some questions answered. Will Canada's involvement, as we move forward, truly reflect the words and spirit of this very important motion? Having said that, it will be up to Parliament to hold the government accountable.

Government Orders

Before proceeding, I want to acknowledge the contribution of the many women and men of the Canadian Forces and their families. The forces of today continue the history and traditions of those who fought and died, not only in the two great wars but in many conflict zones throughout the world. We have a responsibility to them, to support them in every way we know how, to honour them and to provide informed and responsible leadership and policy direction to those in the field and to their leadership.

As the Leader of the Opposition said when he spoke in the House:

No one should ever confuse a debate over the future of the mission with a debate over whether or not we support our troops.

Just a few weeks ago in Winnipeg, I had the opportunity to attend a dinner for the Military Family Resource Centre. I want to reiterate here the importance of the support that we must give to the families. They are families who have a member of their family involved in a very stressful occupation that is under constant public scrutiny. The services this resource centre in Winnipeg provides are far-reaching with a broad scope of activities, and the work it does is beyond measure.

Canada's participation in Afghanistan was very much part of a broader coalition response to 9/11 and the Taliban's refusal to turn over al-Qaeda. It is sufficient to say that the circumstances of Canada's participation in Afghanistan today are very different from when we first engaged there. I would suggest that the criteria by which we measure success are very different today from that time.

While there appears to be some modest success or modest gains, the conditions in many parts of the country are no better and some are much worse. Therefore, if we acknowledge that the circumstances of Canada's engagement are quite different, we have little ground for believing that this engagement can end soon or successfully, for we have heard many times from military and political leaders that it will be many years before success, as it is defined, will be achieved in Afghanistan.

Mr. Manley, in his report, qualified his report at the end when he indicated that even if all the conditions of his recommendations are met, they will carry "a reasonable probability of success".

What this motion says is that Canada will not be there for generations or in perpetuity and that the responsibility for the heavy lifting in this NATO-led mission must be more fairly reapportioned.

As many have commented before me, the motion is one that is committed to change, to a firm end date and to being more than just about military or defence. It is about a balance, a real true balance with diplomacy and development. The motion speaks clearly to this fact.

● (1120)

The heavy military burdens that Canada has absorbed must come to an end by February 2009. I expect that when the government representatives meet in Europe in early April, it must be made clear that Canada is not looking for reinforcements but replacements. It is not a question of helping Canada, as I have heard many leaders of other NATO countries speak to, but one of taking over the lead in the combat role so that Canadians take over a more prominent role in providing training for Afghans to foster their capacity for army and police responsibilities and security for reconstruction.

I expect the current government to emphasize that the Canadian role in the new mission following February 2009 will not be a proactive counter-insurgency mission and that the lead in that role will fall to others. This rotation is based on the expectation of rotation within the mission in Afghanistan since NATO took responsibility in 2003.

For me, support for the motion is based on the clear understanding of commitment by the government, which, I might add, wasted a year of possible negotiation and discussion, that a real rotation will take place.

I have a further question. Why are we talking about a contingent of 1,000 NATO troops for rotation? Will 1,000 troops be a replacement? The Manley commission identified 1,000 more troops to help Canada but I do not understand why it is 1,000. How many are really needed for a replacement?

The Liberals called for sufficient troops and we need clarity as to what that means and we need assurances that the government is acting in good faith. As I said earlier, this is not an engagement in perpetuity. A clear end date is required for planning and preparation for a departure.

I also need to know why the government has chosen to end the mission in July 2011, with a full withdrawal by December 2011. What is the magic of that date? The Liberal proposal of a withdrawal date of February 2011 was chosen because of the timeline laid out in the Afghan compact. I need a rationale as to why the dates have been set as they have been in the motion.

We need a real commitment to a balanced Canadian mission in Afghanistan. We know that to date development activities have been subjugated to the defence activities. The main objectives of the Afghan mission have never been absolutely clarified. The stability and security of the country will only come through the stability and capacity of the institutions of the country.

We know that the role of CIDA has been virtually ineffective, with small isolated successes, but that there has been no CIDA strategy since 2003. At best, its activities have been ad hoc and its successes have been limited. Some reports have even indicated that \$1.6 billion have been wasted in the efforts there.

Diplomatic efforts have never been visible. At the beginning of his report, Mr. Manley said:

Both the reality and the perception of corruption in the Government of Afghanistan must be rooted out. They are undermining not only the hope for an Afghan solution but also support for the Western forces sacrificing their lives to help secure the situation.

Diplomatic efforts need to be enhanced. We cannot have further excuses from the Afghan government as to why reforms are not taking place.

How have detainees been treated? Just yesterday we learned of the Military Police Complaints Commission's concerns over the Canadian government's handling of detainees. We need transparency and assurances.

Government Orders

I am hopeful but skeptical about the government's true commitment to the real intent of the motion: a changed mission, a clear end date and a rebalanced mission. Canadians across the country share both the hope and, regrettably, the uncertainty of the reality of the commitment. Canadians deserve to know that their questions will be answered and that the government of the day will honour the intent of the motion and the will of the House will be followed.

• (1125)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the intervention by the member opposite and I want to read into the record part of the motion. It states:

—that Canada should continue a military presence in Kandahar beyond February 2009, to July 2011, in a manner fully consistent with the mandate on Afghanistan, and that the military mission should consist of:

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

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

Last week I had the privilege of attending a luncheon at which a number of female parliamentarians from Afghanistan were present. They were very clear in their request to us that they wanted us to stand with them in the continuing security efforts that were necessary for the reconstruction and development to occur.

In addition to that, we know Canada is contributing a great deal of money to the microfinance donor program. In fact, two-thirds of the recipients of this microfinance activity are women. The repayment is over 90%, and that is probably because women who are repaying them are doing a great job.

Does the member agree that it is important for us to continue our security efforts there and that this is especially crucial for girls and women in Afghanistan?

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, I remind my colleague that I have read the motion and understand what it says.

It is a security role. The training of the Afghan police and army should be our primary role as we move forward. I spoke to that in my remarks. It is not a combat role.

Many of us met with the parliamentarians from Afghanistan and heard their concerns and issues. We acknowledge the successes that have taken place to address some of their needs, but I emphasize the fact that there is no planning. It has been done on an ad hoc basis with little planning and relatively little impact. We must continue.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's comments. I have a couple of points to make and then a question.

First, it seems to me that the Liberal Party's position, which it held strenuously before, notwithstanding that it helped to extend this mission to 2009, was that there had to be a withdrawal from the combat mission. Now it has entirely flipped and flopped and caved to supporting what everyone knows is an extension of the combat mission.

Everything in the motion shows that. Having a special committee, I am sorry, does not guarantee a 3D approach. Money in the bank dedicated to the mission will. Therefore, the Liberal Party cannot

hide behind words. There have to be actions. A thousand troops, more helicopters and drones do not add to the other two Ds that need help.

I want to ask the member if she would agree with the following. Canadians, for example, are led to believe the biggest urgency revealed by the Manley report is the need to muster another 1,000 troops. Meanwhile the Harper government takes no steps whatsoever to—

• (1130)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I heard the end of the hon. member's question. However, from my perspective and the perspective of many of my colleagues, the end of the combat mission as of 2009 is critical to the intent of the motion.

I am operating on good faith that the will of Parliament will be observed by the government of the day as we move forward in this role.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to this very complex issue, Afghanistan. I think most of us here visit our schools and speak to our students from time to time. Inevitably, I am asked the question whether Canada should be in Afghanistan. Unequivocally, my answer is yes. We have made the right decision to be there. I believe in multilateralism, as flawed as it may be. I believe in the UN and NATO. However, we need to maybe modify these structures somewhat as they are somewhat outdated.

It is important for some of the poorest countries in the world to know that there are organizations out there that can intervene on their behalf when they are stuck in very difficult situations. Canada is a very privileged nation. I tell the students this as well. We are G-7 country. We are privileged to be here. It would be very difficult for us to promote human rights at home but not do it in other countries where there are human rights abuses. It would be very easy for us to say that we are comfortable here, that nothing is happening and go on with our daily lives. However, as a responsible nation, as privileged nation, as one of the richest nations in the world, we need to intervene when the time comes.

I have already said this in the House. Probably the most difficult decision a member of Parliament has to make is whether we send our young men and women to war. In the case of Afghanistan, I am convinced it was a good cause. We joined our NATO allies in 2002. It was also a UN-mandated mission. I believe we are there for the right reasons, and two come to mind right now.

First, the Taliban regime was not only encouraging terrorists, it was helping train them. Some of my colleagues on the other side spoke about 9/11 and how it changed the world. I could not agree more. After 9/11 we realized that what was happening overseas, what was happening thousands of miles away, was having an impact on us. We realized that we had to act drastically to reduce the risks of this happening.

Government Orders

Second is the Taliban treatment of their people. Think of what Afghans have been through over the last decades, with Russia being there and then the Taliban coming in. We have all seen pictures on TV of men throwing acid in women's faces if they are not wearing a veil or young school girls watching as their teacher's is being head cut off because he is teaching them. If they cannot count on a country like Canada to come in and defend their interests, on whom can they count?

Therefore, I believe that, in the first instance, we absolutely had a responsibility to be there.

One of my colleagues on the other side said that we should not question our decision to go there. We should always discuss and debate our role there. It is important for it not to become impersonal. As members of Parliament, this has to remain a personal thing for us. I think people in Afghanistan, our soldiers and our people working in the medical field expect us to continue discussing and debating this to see what changes should be made or if we should modify our position on things. I do not believe for a minute that we should be taking a position and saying that we are not going to modifying it, that we should not be discussing it and that we are supporting our troops and that is it. There has to be some flexibility.

It is easy when a conflict is happening thousands of miles away for it to become very impersonal. We see a clip on national TV for a few minutes and then we go on with our daily lives. As members of Parliament, we cannot let that happen. It has to be personal.

This does not mean for a second that we are not proud of our soldiers for the amazing work they do there. In fact, a young soldier in my riding did a six month stint in Afghanistan. I asked him to meet with me so he could tell me what he thought after his stint, what he had faced when he was there and whether he thought we made a difference there. Interestingly enough he told me that he had no intention of joining the military. It was not part of his plans. He decided after 9/11. It actually impressed upon him that he had a responsibility to get involved, which is interesting. Therefore, he went to Afghanistan for six months.

He told me they were making a substantial difference. He said that they would go into villages that had been raided by the Taliban and the people had left. They would secure the villages, bring in clinics, for instance, and people would come back. They were making a substantial difference. He was very proud of his role and very proud of Canada's role.

● (1135)

That is not to say there is not a dark side to any war. This young man's mother, whom I know very well, would get up in the morning and dread reading the paper in case she would see another young Canadian had lost his or her life. She said that her heart would skip a beat every time she opened a newspaper. We have to realize there is a personal impact to this as well.

The second personal impact is obviously the repercussions of post-traumatic stress disorder. I am sure most of us here have had young people come back from Afghanistan and speak to us. A few cases were absolutely devastating for them, obviously, and for me. These young people are 20 to 25 years old and their lives are essentially ruined. One person could not sleep at night for a year or

two, no matter what medication he was given. He did not have access to a psychiatrist because there were not enough to deal with that type of post-traumatic stress. He tried to take on a few jobs, but had to quit because of the pressure and the panic. There are consequences. When we make these decisions, there are huge consequences for our young people. Although we support them wholeheartedly, I want people to know there is another side to this. We do not want to glorify war and we always want to avoid it at every cost.

The third issue was addressed on *W-FIVE* last night. It was an astonishing show. It featured a medical unit in Afghanistan and showed the number of people who went through it. We hear about Canadians being injured, but it was literally kept busy 24 hours a day with people going through it. What we do not realize is that for every Canadian, or American or Dutch troop going in, 20 civilians are going into those clinics. Young boys and girls with unbelievable injuries are in those clinics. I am very pleased our Canadians are there to look after them. Some of these injuries are caused by our people, and that is the price of war. However, they pay a huge price.

For every mother in Canada who is worried about her son or daughter, there are mothers in Afghanistan who are worried about the same thing. It is important to mention that when we make these decisions here for things that happen 2,000 miles away, there are consequences and we have to be aware of that.

One of the frustrating things for me was the unwillingness of NATO to rotate other troops. We have been in Kandahar province since February 2002, arguably the most dangerous province in Afghanistan. We have lost more soldiers proportionately than the U.S. soldiers in Iraq. No one can say Canada has not done its share. It is not unreasonable for us to ask NATO at this point to rotate other troops into the tough areas. Some countries do not want to fight at night. Some do not want to send their troops to hotspots. Others will not send soldiers at all. Most of these decisions are made for political reasons at home and, frankly, it is a sad thing.

NATO's reputation is being questioned right now. We have to look at the whole mandate of NATO and how we should be looking at it in the future in terms of sharing. The countries in which we are intervening should know that we are going in as a united force, as a team, not only two or three out of twenty-six countries carrying the weight. This is a huge issue.

I am very pleased the mission is changing in 2009. I am pleased it is ending in 2011. Our focus will be on renewed security, reconstruction, development, governance. There is a lot at stake. In the end we have to not only hope, but we have to do everything in our power to make Afghanistan a better place for its citizens to live in the long term, because the short term costs are enormous.

● (1140)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member opposite concerning the mission in Afghanistan.

As he might well know, the area in Afghanistan in which Canadian Forces are engaged is the Kandahar province area. It is an area that is at the northwest frontier of the South Asian continent. It is demarcated by the Durand Line, a line that was established over 100 years ago by the British and the Afghans, demarcating the difference between what was then British India and Afghanistan.

What is also the case is that the Pashtun tribal area is divided up by this international border.

How does he propose to ensure that the nation state constructs of Afghanistan and Pakistan continue and will be able to assert their sovereignty over those areas? Are there other solutions that might be available to ensure that this nation state construct remains integral to that area, or does he believe that it may not be possible to ever do that, that there are too many difficulties in overcoming tribal conflicts in that cross-border area?

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for the question and it is a very good question, actually.

When we enter places like Afghanistan, we have to understand the complexities. Sometimes it is something that the western world does not understand. We walk in and we think that we will be there for a few months, we will do our job and we will leave. But the tribal leader issue, the different communities, the warlords, and the poppies that are being grown, all impact what is going on over there.

I do think that we have been weak in terms of diplomacy. I do not think, in the end, that there is a military solution to this. I think that we have to work both angles.

Having said that, I am trying to think how we would negotiate with the Taliban. I am not sure that these people are open to compromise that much, so again it is a difficult situation, but in the end, I do not think any country can be there forever. At one point, there has to be an end game to this, and the only way that this can happen is if people sit down and talk. I do believe that there are solutions and that at one point people will want to stop the war.

Hopefully, when we leave there, we will have left it a better place than when we came in.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me take a quick second to apologize for not listening to you more carefully in your point of order.

I want to read into the record a critique that has been brought forward, and I would like to hear the hon. member's response. It is talking about the thousand more troops that have been focused on. The quote states: "Meanwhile the Harper government takes no steps whatsoever to address the real weaknesses: the misguided US—".

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The reason I interrupted the member the last time was because he kept referring to the Prime Minister by name and he has done it again.

The hon. member for Saint Boniface.

• (1145)

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure there was a question there.

The thousand troops issue is probably something that is very needed. I am not sure it is the answer. In the end, we are going to

Speaker's Ruling

need NATO to revise its position and push some of its member countries to bring in a substantial number of troops into the Kandahar region. I would hope that it would do that very quickly so that Canada can get onto its role of development, governance building, and things that we are extremely good at.

I do think that we have done the heavy lifting on this and that NATO has a responsibility to bring other people in.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

WAYS AND MEANS MOTION NO. 10—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East on March 11 concerning the admissibility of the ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget for which the hon. Minister of Finance gave notice on that day.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East for initially bringing this matter to the attention of the House, as well as for his subsequent intervention, and I would also like to thank the hon. member for Markham—Unionville, the hon. government House leader, and the hon. House leader for the Bloc Québécois for their submissions.

[*Translation*]

The member for Pickering—Scarborough East, in raising the matter, claimed that Ways and Means Motion No. 10, standing on the order paper in the name of the Minister of Finance, seeks to have the House decide upon a matter which it had already voted on.

That vote took place on March 5, 2008, when Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions) was adopted at third reading. To this issue, the member for Markham—Unionville has added the contention that Ways and Means Motion No. 10, by including provisions related to Bill C-253, seeks to implement a measure that does not flow from the most recent budget, thus, he alleges, enlarging the usual parameters of budget implementation ways and means motions.

He further contended that this was a backdoor attempt to circumvent the rights of private members as provided for in the rules governing this category of business.

[*English*]

For the sake of clarity, I should state that sections 45 to 48 of Ways and Means Motion No. 10 are the subject of this point of order. They are conditional amendments that seek to amend or repeal the amendments to the Income Tax Act contained in Bill C-253 should the latter receive royal assent. The stated objective of these ways and means measures is, to quote the Minister of Finance at page 3971 of the *Debates*, "—to protect Canada's fiscal framework".

The government House leader asserted that the broad scope of Ways and Means Motion No. 10, and the wide range of taxation and fiscal measures it seeks to implement are clear evidence that the motion is fundamentally a different matter than was Bill C-253, and therefore, that it should be allowed to proceed.

Government Orders

In support of his arguments a number of procedural authorities were cited, some of which I will return to later in this ruling.

Let me first deal with the argument that the inclusion of provisions regarding Bill C-253 in Ways and Means Motion No. 10 does not respect our conventions regarding the content of such motions.

The Chair wishes to remind the House that the budget speech and bills based on ways and means motions tabled at a later date are not necessarily linked. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states at page 748:

[*Translation*]

While a Budget is normally followed by the introduction of Ways and Means bills, such bills do not have to be preceded by a Budget presentation. Generally, taxation legislation can be introduced at any time during a session; the only prerequisite being prior concurrence in a Ways and Means motion.

• (1150)

[*English*]

At page 759, Marleau and Montpetit goes on to state:

The adoption of a Ways and Means motion stands as an order of the House either to bring in a bill or bills based on the provisions of that motion or to propose an amendment or amendments to a bill then before the House.

That text footnotes examples from 1971, 1973, and 1997. Furthermore, in the case before us, it must be noted that the title of Ways and Means Motion No. 10 states clearly that it not only implements certain provisions of the February 26, 2008 budget, but that it also aims to:

—enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget.

On this point, namely the objection that the motion includes provisions that were not contained in the budget, the Chair must conclude that Ways and Means Motion No. 10 is not procedurally flawed.

Let us now turn to the argument that the decision of the House to adopt Bill C-253 at third reading must stand since the House cannot be asked to pronounce itself again in the same session on the same subject.

The Chair wishes to remind hon. members that while a part of Ways and Means Motion No. 10 touches on Bill C-253, the question that the House will actually be asked to vote on today, assuming it is called today, is not the same as the question it agreed to on March 5, 2008, when it adopted the bill at third reading.

In this regard the Chair has found a number of examples where a bill repeals sections of an act already amended by another bill adopted by the House in the same session.

For example, in the first session of the 38th Parliament, Bill C-18, An Act to amend the Telefilm Canada Act and another Act, and Bill C-43, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 23, 2005, both proposed to amend subsection 85(1) of the Financial Administration Act.

In addition, there are also examples of bills proceeding concurrently even though some of their provisions are dependent upon one another.

As mentioned by the government House leader, Mr. Speaker Lamoureux ruled on February 24, 1971, on such a situation at page 3712 of the *Debates*. He stated:

There is, therefore, in my view, nothing procedurally wrong in having before the House at the same time concurrent or related bills which might be in contradiction with one another either because of the terms of the proposed legislation itself or in relation to proposed amendments.

This is further supported by the 23rd edition of Erskine May at page 580, which affirms that:

There is no rule against the amendment or the repeal of an act of the same session.

Most compelling are the rulings of Mr. Speaker Fraser from June 8, 1988, and I refer to the *Debates* at pages 16252 to 16258, and on November 28, 1991, pages 5513 to 5514, both of which were quoted by the government House leader. These rulings clearly support the view that the progress of any bill flowing from Ways and Means Motion No. 10 rests with the House.

As Mr. Speaker Fraser put it on November 28, 1991:

The legislative process affords ample opportunity for amending proposed legislation during the detailed clause by clause study in committee and again at the report stage in the House.

Insofar as this process affects private members' business as a category of business or indeed the rights of individual members to propose initiatives, I must point out that it is not the Speaker but the House which ultimately decides such matters.

For the reasons stated above, the Chair finds that Ways and Means Motion No. 10, as tabled by the Minister of Finance, may proceed in its current form.

Once again, I would like to thank the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East for having raised this matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to our mission in Afghanistan. Our government believes that the Afghan mission is important. It is important to the people of that country and it is important to Canadians. It is especially important to the Canadian sons and daughters who are on the ground there, our military, our diplomats and the civilian aid workers who are all trying to rebuild the lives and livelihoods of the Afghan people.

Government Orders

Last week, Mr. Speaker, you introduced six women seated in that gallery. Those women were parliamentarians in the fledgling Afghan government. Seven short years ago those same women could not have left their homes without burkas or unaccompanied by a male relative. Seven years ago they could not walk to the corner by themselves or access medical care. Now they are free to travel halfway around the world to sit in the gallery of the Canadian Parliament with their faces bare.

As parliamentarians in Canada, we all face certain challenges but having our lives threatened constantly is not one of them. These female Afghan parliamentarians deal with this threat on a daily basis.

In this, our 39th Parliament, 21% of the members are women. In Afghanistan, women account for 25% of parliament. They have no budget for a constituency office and must perform their duties, one on one, over vast areas of terrain under dangerous conditions.

What makes these women leave the relative safety of their homes to take on this very dangerous task? According to them, it is quite simple. They have an inner knowledge that their daring stand for democracy will ultimately have a positive effect on their lives and the lives of their children.

Canadian parliamentarians stood and applauded the bravery of these women and their achievements. I, therefore, see no reason why any member would choose not to continue to stand for them as they continue to rebuild their country into a place that is governed by a democratically elected Parliament, the rule of law, human rights and freedom.

Their victory will not happen overnight, but we knew that going in, and our Canadian Forces on the ground knew that going in.

We in this Parliament have a clear choice. We can be part of the solution or we can be part of the problem. Ten reservists from my riding made their decision themselves when they left a short time ago for a tour of duty in Afghanistan. They are going to do their part. Five Rocky Mountain Rangers have already been there for a tour of duty and, thankfully, returned safely.

I have spoken to them and I have heard the stories of their many successes, which add up to progress being made for the Afghan people. They have no regrets. They are the creators of change.

In January of this year, an American aid worker and her driver were abducted in Kandahar. Cyd Mizell had worked in the area for six years on educational projects and women's development. To date, she and her driver have not been found. In a show of support, 500 Afghan women gathered to protest the kidnapping. They called on officials, elders and ordinary citizens to work for her release. These women could not have dared to rally seven years ago. Canadians made it possible.

Just last week, Afghans celebrated International Women's Day. Hundreds of women marched for peace in Kandahar, the hotbed of Taliban insurgents. In the north, women held public meetings in the provincial capitals on giving women voices, with the provincial governors, women's councils, local police, judges and religious leaders participating. These meetings would not have been allowed to take place seven years ago. Canadians made it possible.

None of this progress would have been made without the security of the NATO troops provided to the Afghan people.

There are members of the House who would have our troops pulled out of Afghanistan immediately. Those members undermine the positive work that is going on in Afghanistan. Their propaganda is an insult to today's military and to the men and women who have served in areas of conflict during the history of our nation.

Canadians have never cut and run when the going got tough. We have a tradition of coming to the aid of those in need, whether it is in a peacekeeping capacity or in a peace-making capacity, and we do it well.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I have had many opportunities to attend special remembrance ceremonies, both here and abroad. I have also witnessed the increased awareness of our military history among the younger generation. There is an earned pride that comes with the awareness and an appreciation for the sacrifices made in the name of oppressed people around the world.

• (1155)

Today, one only has to see the overpasses on the Highway of Heroes jammed with saluting, flag-waving Canadians for a member of our military who has paid the ultimate price and has returned home for burial. It is truly remarkable.

Canadians are gaining a renewed pride in our military men and women who, for too long, were underfunded and ignored by the government. Members of the military are now getting the recognition they so richly deserve and, I must say, some are quite surprised by it.

When we walk up to any man or woman in uniform and thank them for all they do for us, their first reaction is a quizzical look, then a big smile and a bit of embarrassment. Our military do not serve for praise. They are proud to wear their uniform and serve their country.

I have not been to Afghanistan but I am aware of the many successes, such as the mortality rate for newborns declining 22% because the number of skilled childbirth workers has almost quadrupled since 2001. Access to basic medical services has increased to 83%, up from 9% in 2004.

I recognize that there are close to six million children, a full one-third girls, now enrolled in school compared to only 700,000 exclusively male children in 2001. I am aware of the wonderful opportunities, through the Canadian micro-finance plan, that allows women to run their own small businesses to support their families.

However, there is no more compelling evidence for me that the failing Afghan state is on the road to recovery than the sight of those six women sitting in the gallery. They are putting their lives on the line for their country and they deserve no less than our full support.

Our world will be a better place with a free and democratic Afghanistan.

Government Orders

•(1200)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I attempted earlier to read into the record a quote in the *Policy Options* magazine but I did not do it in the right manner, so I will keep that in mind.

The quote simply states that the present “government—”, as opposed to the nomenclature I gave it earlier:

—takes no steps whatsoever to address the real weaknesses: the misguided US command and control effort; chaos and corruption in the Western-sponsored Karzai regime;...

The reason I read that for comment is because it is a quote, not from a New Democrat, but from someone who actually ran for the Conservative Party, and the member will probably know him, Arthur Kent. His point was that what is being proposed in this motion, with the Liberal Party supporting the government, is 1,000 more troops.

Whose command and control will those troops be under? If it is, as we believe, American troops, we should also know that they will not be under the command and control of any other country. What will happen to the command structure of the 1,000 troops, which we will get and I think everyone knows that, if they come from the United States? Will they be under American command and control? What will happen in that scenario?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of things I would like to say but I will control myself.

Canadian soldiers will be under RC South, which is Canadian held. We will be looking after and directing our own soldiers.

I have a question for the member. He just made a statement, which I did not understand, so maybe he can help me. How does his party stand against freedom for women, against democracy, against the rule of law, against the strong and historic Canadian embassies and all the things we have done as a country to make the world a better place in which to live?

I do not understand why NDP members do not understand what it is we are doing. We are making a tremendous difference. We are doing what Canadian people have done for centuries. We are making a difference for oppressed people.

I deal with veterans on a day by day basis. I am very proud of what they have managed to accomplish. They should be proud of themselves, and they are, but they are very humble. They were just doing their duty. The Canadian Forces are doing what our forces have been doing for years.

I simply cannot understand the member's comments.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, although I did not get an answer to my question, I will answer the member's question.

I am the son of a veteran. Both of my grandfathers are World War I veterans and my father is a veteran of World War II. I understand Canadian service. It is about how we make a difference, not whether or not we will make a difference.

My question back for the hon. member has to do with how we make the difference. Canada is supporting a corrupt regime. I met with the six Afghan members of parliament. I also know of another Afghan member of parliament, the only elected member representing

a constituency, who was thrown out of parliament because she objected to the corruption in parliament. That is the government that Canada is supporting.

There is no question that the Taliban are bad guys but at one time we supported them in their fight against the Soviets.

The question is not whether or not we are against one group. The question is how we can best make a difference in Afghanistan and—

•(1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. parliamentary secretary has less than a minute left.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, we are in this Parliament and we have different groups representing all Canadians. We have a group whose sole purpose in the House of Commons is to separate from Canada. We have another group that is most definitely socialist in nature. However, as a group, we manage very nicely to get along.

For the member to suggest that a new fledgling government will be perfect, when he sits in a House that is far from perfect, makes no sense at all to me.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to be here today to speak to the motion on Canada's role in Afghanistan. I am glad to see that the government and the official opposition have reached an agreement on Canada's mission in Afghanistan. This motion is neither a Conservative nor a Liberal motion; it is a Canadian motion that is consistent with our history and our values.

During the first world war, Conservative Robert Borden was in power. Historians witnessed the birth of Canada as a nation in the hell of trench warfare.

Some thirty years later, Mackenzie King, a Liberal, led our country through the second world war.

We fought alongside our American and British allies and played a role in the success of one of the biggest land invasions in history.

I sit on the national defence and had the privilege of asking Brigadier General Atkinson about the intelligence gathering abilities of the Taliban. I think too many in the House assume that the Taliban are a ragtag band of primeval warriors, and it is easy to think that because their values are so primitive.

However Brigadier General Atkinson answered thoughtfully. He stated that when a story is printed the *Ottawa Citizen* today, no matter what it is, it is being read. If it is on the BBC news or from somewhere else, they have it.

We should all ponder that statement when we debate in the House. It is not the statements of the general are anything new either. I think we can all remember that notable phrase from World War II that “loose lips sink ships” and it is not much different from that.

While I certainly understand that the modern media and communications has made issues like this vastly more complicated, all members should take time to examine the consciences. What we say in these halls might as well be said on the streets of Kandahar.

Government Orders

At the conclusion of this debate, we will show the Taliban and other radical groups how disputes should be settled, by a democratic debate and then a vote. However, after this vote, I would ask that all members remember the soldiers on the ground and support them in their task.

Providing helpful, strategic or tactical criticism is one thing, but all too often the farcical cries of question period are now proffered as legitimate advice on war and conflict.

The House should also know that it is not just generals expressing concern, but good-hearted journalists, like Christie Blatchford of the *Globe and Mail*. It is not often I quote journalists, but her column was particularly instructive. Speaking to her Afghan translator, who had recent communications with village friends in the countryside, she stated:

Truth is, it is quite believable that the Taliban would target Canadians if they sense that it is a useful time to inflict casualties.

Afghanistan may be a country reduced to rubble...but that doesn't translate to a primitive enemy...

I would like all members to remember these warnings, not as forcing silence but of asking wisdom of our spoken words.

We have made great strides in Afghanistan in the relatively short time that we have been there. Many members have spoken about this amazing progress, particularly for women. While it is far from perfect, it is far and away amazing progress in the last six years.

Consider the scenes we witnessed in the 1990s, a shaking and visibly fearful woman under a burqa, bending over in a soccer stadium while her barbaric executioner shoots her in the head. These are not visions from medieval Europe, but realities from just a short time ago in Afghanistan.

Then let us consider the pleasure that we had in the House just a short time ago as Afghan women parliamentarians sat in our galleries. Many of us went and visited with them and then thanked them for their bravery.

Just this past weekend, 1,000 women gathered in Kandahar to celebrate International Women's Day. This is from CP reporter Stephanie Levitz:

Since 2001 and the fall of the Taliban, women are slowly rising back up through the ranks of Afghan society. They sit in government, run hospitals and have regained the right to an education.

"This year is better than last year and the year before last year," said Dr. Farishta Bwar, who works in the department of public health. "Every day the women's life becomes a little better."

If these women can be brave, the least members can do in this place is stand with them. Unfortunately, some in the House would rather steep in their wilful denial of reality and their reckless ideology than embrace actual women with greater challenges.

I raise these issues not out of partisan wrangling, but out of genuine concern for the men and women. It seems from the debate thus far that the opposition and the government have come to an agreement that our troops will be in Kandahar till 2011. They will still be in danger and their families will still miss them terribly.

●(1210)

Canadian Forces Base Petawawa is located in my riding. One of my favourite constituency week activities is visiting the base, the soldiers and families of these brave women and men. These families have something to say. A child of a soldier who has served in Afghanistan wrote a wonderful speech, part of which bears reading into the record. This is what he had to say, not just of his dad who is undoubtedly a hero, but of the mother, a hero in his life. He said:

When people think of heroes what often comes to their mind is some fictional character like Batman or Superman. For me the person who first came to my mind was my Dad. He's a soldier and he's on his fifth deployment this time trying to make a better life for the people in Afghanistan.

But thinking more about heroes, I realize that a hero often has a "silent hero" behind him or her. The only way my Dad can be a hero and do what he does is to have a great person supporting him here in Canada. That made me think of the heroes behind the heroes, like my Mom.

She has stood behind my Dad's decisions to go on deployments and to move along with him when we were posted yet another time. She had to resign her jobs numerous times and give up her family and friends from the time she dated my Dad. Every move brought her new challenges, new environments and new adjustments to her life and career.

She keeps and has kept our family going while our Dad is gone on a deployment or an exercise. Although I miss my Dad when he's gone, my Mom makes sure our life just continues as if he were there.

In all this debate let us not forget the thousands of moms and dads who are also making a sacrifice, who sacrifice their children, their wives and husbands for the calling that we ask of them. Let us choose our words wisely for their sake, for all our sakes.

One of my constituents also expressed some important points on why we are in Afghanistan. He wrote in his letter:

Should we be there? It's a difficult question to answer. There are so many reasons to say, "yes": Protecting the rights of women; promoting democracy; stopping the drug trade; promoting education and helping their country develop, so they can be a strong nation and learn to solve their own problems, fighting tyranny and intolerance, everything that Canada stands for. The answer is, yes. We should be in Afghanistan and take a closer look.

I am glad, as a member of the House, that the government and the official opposition have reached consensus on this issue. It sends a clear message to our troops and to Canadians of our intentions. It also sends a clear message to the Taliban that our wills cannot be shaken by their shadowy and cowardly acts.

There are so many successes in Afghanistan, whether it is the girls going to schools, the medical advances or the economic progress being made. I urge all members not to throw this away by a premature withdrawal.

With more troops, helicopters and UAVs, our troops will show even greater progress in the years to come. I, for certain, am looking forward to hearing their stories of success.

Government Orders

●(1215)

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member. This is a really important debate in the House and has implications across our land and around the world. It is important that all of us get up and, in a respectful manner in which she presented her case, be heard and be responded to with respect in questions and comments from others and those who might disagree.

Does the member understand, in her support of this new arrangement between the Liberals and the Conservatives, that the Liberals expect that the mission will change and change dramatically and radically? They have asked the question of the government as to where the number of 1,000 troops came from? What was the supporting documentation to come to a decision that 1,000 troops were needed? She talked about more troops, more artillery and more everything being needed to actually win this war. How will she deal with the aftermath of this resolution when it becomes obviously clear that the Liberals have quite a different understanding of the motion?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, as has been said in the House, the question of where 1,000 troops comes from is referenced in the Manley report. I am well aware of what different people think on this subject. However, as many hours as we have debated this, and it is coming to a conclusion and hopefully a vote, it would have been instructive for the Manley panel to have been invited to the defence committee, upon which I sit.

A motion was put forth so intricate questions, like the question the member asked me, could be directed specifically to the eminent members on the panel Mr. Manley led. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, the opposition did not want to hear the answers to these questions and did not want the greater public to have a better understanding of what the eminent Canadians appointed to the Manley panel did while they were away.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's remarks and she asked us to carefully measure our words in this debate. She certainly has set the tone in that regard.

Many of us last week had the privilege of meeting a number of female parliamentarians from Afghanistan. They stood with us and requested that we not abandon them in this mission of providing the security that allowed the reconstruction and redevelopment to occur.

Would my colleague comment on the difference it would make if we were to abandon these women at this time and on the huge difference we have made for women and girls in Afghanistan?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, in listening to the women parliamentarians from Afghanistan, it put into perspective the minor issues we have to deal with involving safety and privacy issues as a parliamentarian. To be a parliamentarian, these women not only put their lives at stake, but the lives of their families and children as well.

The day prior to the day I met with those ladies we had another casualty in Afghanistan. The Governor General was there and they asked her if they could stand with her on the tarmac in Trenton when the body of the soldier was repatriated. Every time we lose a soldier, it pains them as well. They know these soldiers have given up their

lives so they and their children can lead a better life. This really spoke to the appreciation that Afghan people have for our sacrifices in wanting to be there to comfort the family whose loved one was returning home.

●(1220)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I take the responsibility we have with great seriousness. In my view it is unfortunate the debate has not happened in a more fulsome way across the country.

This government initiative is of fundamental importance to all of us. Nothing the government does is more serious than sending our armed forces into another country. In light of that, it is important that we have this debate, but we also have to find some way to reach out to the broader society and allow Canadians the opportunity to have their say. People want to engage in debate on this issue because they are concerned. They are on both sides of this issue. We need to be respectful of and open to the possibility of their coming forward to put their thoughts on the table for us to consider.

In my few minutes today I am going to bring to the table some thoughts on this subject from some of the faith groups in Canada. They have taken great pains to gather information, to do research, to put together positions, and write letters to the powers that be on the important subject of our engagement in the lives of the people of Afghanistan.

There are a number of questions that need to be addressed, and they will be addressed ultimately by all of us as we stand to vote this afternoon.

Is the war winnable? If so, at what cost to Canadians, at what cost to the Canadian armed forces, and most important, at what cost to the people of Afghanistan? Is there a higher moral and ethical value that we need to consider than simply the logistics of executing a war in order to win that war? Is there a higher moral and ethical value that we need to consider if we want to be helpful in that area of the world that has been wracked with difficulty for such a long period of time?

Ultimately then, having considered those questions which I put forward with respect and humility to my colleagues, will this resolution that we are debating today get us there? Will it set us on a path to something which would be a win for everybody concerned? Will it respect the higher values and moral and ethical considerations of many around the world who look at war from a different perspective after having fought world wars and other wars of great consequence and great devastation and destruction?

The first question I will address is, is the war winnable? That is questionable at best and it is certainly not winnable without more troops and artillery as was outlined so clearly in the Manley report.

The story of the Afghan people is not dissimilar to stories in other parts of the world where outside forces try to impose new cultural mores or a new set of values. People will resist and defend with their lives what they treasure most, their land and their freedom.

Government Orders

I only have to look at my own story and the story of the Irish people to understand to some degree what is at play in Afghanistan. The war in Ireland could not be won no matter how many British soldiers were sent in. A resolution and a cease to hostilities was only possible with the Good Friday agreement, a negotiated agreement that involved sitting down with the IRA. As my colleague from Outremont related the other night, Canada played a significant and central role in that effort because we were trusted and because we were seen to be non-aligned.

• (1225)

Two nights ago, the member for British Columbia Southern Interior shared brilliantly the recent experience of the failed Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The Russians used the same tactics as ourselves and yet, after engaging over 100,000 troops, they had to leave not having achieved any of their goals, however noble, and interestingly not unlike our own.

Manley outlines the many signs of failure in Afghanistan. Our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, spoke about them in his opening remarks in this debate. The Associated Press reported 5,000 lives lost in Afghanistan in 2007 alone, 27 of them Canadian soldiers, but that number has now gone up to 31, and thousands of Afghan soldiers, women and children.

History and our experience today should tell us that under the present circumstances this war cannot be won. Even Manley tells us we will need at least another thousand troops. The Liberals asked a good question here in this House. How was that number arrived at? Will that be enough? Will we need more after we discover that a thousand just is not enough? And when do we stop?

I now take us into a broader discussion of the moral and ethical values which need to be considered as we look at this resolution and the further engagement of Canada in this insurgency. In its communiqué of January 24, 2008, the Canadian Council of Churches referred to its letter of June 25, 2007 to the Prime Minister, in which it emphasized three points:

- 1) the primary goal of Canadian engagement in Afghanistan must be the pursuit of peace for the people of Afghanistan rather than forwarding the war on terror;
- 2) a political solution for reconciliation among the people of Afghanistan must be found using all available diplomatic means, including engaging civil society and religious networks; and
- 3) the efforts of Canadian Forces must be directed to the protection of lives and the preservation of civilian infrastructure.

In a statement in February of this year, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said:

The people of Afghanistan want peace. We hope this conviction will be central to the deliberations by the Parliament of Canada. Political and electoral considerations must take second place when it is a question of human lives and a people's future. We would invite the members of Parliament to put aside any predetermined stances, recognizing that the truth will involve concerted efforts. Diverse points of view need to be welcomed as contributions toward developing a detailed and constructive action plan, with peace as the ultimate goal.

Over the centuries, the Catholic Church has developed a rich and wise social teaching that can help inform the present discussion. I wish to suggest three points that flow from this teaching:

1. "It is hardly possible to imagine that in an atomic era, war could be used as an instrument of justice." Peace negotiations, carried out in good faith and involving all the parties concerned - this approach needs special consideration.
2. A clear distinction must be made between military operations and humanitarian aid. In particular, "humanitarian aid must reach the civilian population and must

never be used to influence those receiving it." Otherwise, one endangers the lives of numerous civilians as well as those humanitarian workers who become targets for the insurgents.

3. The human dignity of Canadian soldiers must be safeguarded. Their moral integrity is brought into question when international law is not respected, especially when the troubling issue is the torture of enemy combatants. Furthermore, the personal well-being of Canadian soldiers and their families must be ensured.

In August 2007 a number of Christian leaders wrote in a letter to the Prime Minister:

We share with you and all Canadians of good will the desire for peace and stability in Afghanistan. As churches, we are committed to protecting human life, promoting human dignity, working for justice, practicing forgiveness, and building peace and reconciliation. These commitments are part of our vision of living out the Good News of God in Jesus Christ.

• (1230)

They ask a number of important questions. For example, under the rubric "Reconciliation":

How can Canada support reconciliation within Afghanistan?...How can Canada support negotiations leading to peace in Afghanistan?...How can Canada foster greater respect for human rights in Afghanistan?...How can Canada support Afghanistan, a fragile state, and promote human rights?...How can Canada best support reconstruction and development in Afghanistan?...How can the Canadian Forces best be deployed in Afghanistan to advance the safety and well being of people wherever they are threatened?...

These are the very questions that we in this caucus, in this little corner of the House, are asking in this very important debate on our engagement in Afghanistan. These leaders of many of the major church groups in our country went on to say:

We believe that The Canadian Forces should focus on enhancing protection of vulnerable Afghans rather than on aggressive engagement with insurgents in areas where the local population is suspicious or alienated from the central government. Such a shift in The Canadian Forces' operational mandate would be an important consideration in the ongoing public dialogue regarding Canada's role in Afghanistan.

These are words and thoughts which all of us should consider seriously and very thoughtfully as we make up our minds as to how long we are going to prolong this engagement and how that engagement is going to unfold in the next few years as we put our resources and efforts toward it.

The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, an organization that does aid work in the third world, had this to say in its paper of October 23, 2006:

1. We are in favour of a prosperous and secure Afghanistan for all, a country where Afghan men and women can live in dignity and enjoy a clear and active participation in the country's social, economic and political life.

It puts forward a number of positions, but I will share with the House two or three of the ones that fit with my thoughts and the presentation here today. That organization said:

3. We ask that responsibility for foreign military operations in Afghanistan be turned over to the United Nations as soon as possible, and that NATO be relieved of this responsibility. It is essential that all military operations avoid being or being seen as a western occupation of the country. All NATO countries (with the exception of Turkey) are western nations.

The organization also stated:

8. We ask that the all party intra-Afghan dialogue, involving both those within and those that have left the country, be re-established. The dialogue must be frank, open, and without fear of retaliation. All parties must have the ability to express their perspectives and grievances and, in doing so, contribute to building a new national consensus.

Government Orders

Those are the thoughtful comments of many of our esteemed church leaders who have spent years thinking about this issue and talking with their colleagues, their communities and others across this country. As we consider where they feel from a moral and ethical perspective we should be going, the question we need to consider as we move toward the vote on this resolution tonight is, can the results of this resolution, based on the Manley report, take us to another place based on the values outlined by many of our faith communities?

Will a recommitment to the insurgency for another three years or more after 2009 lead to peace ultimately, and peace is what all of us want, or will more troops get us there? Really, when we boil it down, that is what is being asked for by the Manley report. It says that we cannot win the war under the present circumstances and with the present engagement, but that if we add more troops and more artillery, we can win somewhere, somehow, down the way. We do not know when and we do not know how much it will take.

● (1235)

All we know, as was ably presented to us the other night by our colleague from British Columbia, is that the Russians, after laying out all the same reasons that we are now laying out for our engagement in Afghanistan, and after having brought in 100,000 troops, had to concede defeat and leave.

As for that report, I do not think so, personally, and that is why I am standing here today to make this thoughtful and serious presentation to all members in the House. There were many intelligent and cogent arguments made by my colleagues and others over the last few days to suggest that they agree as well: this resolution will not get us to that place of peace and freedom that the Afghan people so desperately want.

I will leave my thoughts with members. I will add a couple of ideas more, which members might ruminate on and think about during the few hours before the vote takes place, a couple of conditions that are laid out by those who do this kind of work of looking at what the conditions for a just war in our world today might be.

They say that a just war must be an effort of “last resort”. They say, “For resort to war to be justified, all peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted”. That is what we are asking for here as New Democrats: that all peaceful alternatives be exhausted in this exercise, this effort and this work that we do in Afghanistan.

There are a few other conditions that I think are important. Members might want to take some time to look at them. They are readily available on the Internet, which is where I found them.

The article goes on to say that there has to be some high degree of “probability of success”. The authors say, “This is a difficult criterion to apply, but its purpose is to prevent irrational resort to force or hopeless resistance when the outcome of either will clearly be disproportionate or futile”.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's comments. He certainly gave us a lot of good food for thought. He mentioned that he has heard from a number of different church groups and faith groups. I, too, have heard from many of them. In fact, as a person of

faith, I come from a group that has a rich history of many great peacekeeping and peacemaking initiatives.

Personally, I have struggled as well with what the appropriate response is. I certainly wish that we did not need a military presence. For that matter, many times I wish we did not need a police force. Perhaps in a perfect world, we would not need a military or a police force.

The problem is that in this situation we are dealing with a sector of society that does not share the values of freedom we enjoy here in Canada. As for myself, I have had to come to the conclusion that I cannot stand idly by when innocent women, children and those from other vulnerable groups are raped, abused and murdered. I cannot stand idly by when I have the means to do something.

How would the member respond to the female parliamentarians who visited us last week and pleaded with us not to abandon them but to stand with them in their efforts to provide the security that is necessary for the reconstruction and redevelopment to occur?

● (1240)

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's thoughtful question. I appreciate his faith roots. I agree that the faith community out there is as divided as we are in here in terms of where we should go on this question. That is why it is so important to have this debate and to hear, thoughtfully and respectfully, each other's point of view, so that when we move forward we do it after having taken the time.

I do not think, though, having heard the member's question, that it is helpful to in any way demonize the other side. It never is where war is concerned. It is never helpful to make the other side seem worse than it actually is. It inflames the actual combat itself, and in the end everyone gets hurt and we do not end at a place of peace and freedom, which is what I called for in my speech today.

I suggest that the people of Afghanistan, just like the people of Ireland, where I come from and where I lived for a number of years, believe, understand and appreciate freedom. They know what freedom is about and they want it desperately, just as desperately as we do.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to join in thanking the member for Sault Ste. Marie for his reflective comments today. In one of his questions he turned the tables a bit on us because he used his speech to put questions, and now I suppose in the time for questions and comments we have to give him the answers.

One of the questions he put to the House referred to a suggestion by one of the faith-based groups about the mission changing and being not so much a search and destroy mission but one of providing security. I would ask him if he does not see that within this resolution. That was part of the Liberal amendment that has been adopted by the government: that the mission does change from primarily counter-insurgency to one of providing security and training and of permitting the diplomacy and development aspects of the three Ds approach to work.

That is what I see when I look at the integrity or totality of this motion: that it is changing the mission and providing an end date for the mission so that it is not a perpetual escalation of the conflict.

Government Orders

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the member recognizing what I am doing here, which is to actually enter into a debate and dialogue among us about some of this. I think that is really important. It provides a way for us to disagree, perhaps, but respectfully.

I would suggest that one of the big problems that is going to flow out of this resolution, which I think you probably understand but perhaps have not come to terms with yet, is that you differ fundamentally with what the Conservatives think this resolution is all about. You think it is going to change this mission and that somehow, with these extra 1,000 troops and more artillery, we are now going to suddenly enter into more of a negotiation and reconciliation type of operation there.

I suggest that this is not what the government is thinking. That is not what the government has in mind. You may have signed on to something that perhaps, and I say this with all respect and humility, you do not fully appreciate. I think it is something that you have to work out and think about here tonight, because the decision that we make here tonight, however difficult, between the two of you and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I think the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie is using the second person a little too much. We are supposed to address comments through the Chair and not directly to other MPs. Also, his time was up for that response anyway. We will move on to another question now, from the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

• (1245)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the previous member spoke, she brought in the idea of photographs and what she had seen in photographs. A little red light went on for me, because photographs can be used to justify one or both positions.

However, in relation to the hon. member's comments, he made a lot of comparisons that I am not sure I agree with. Comparing the behaviour of the Soviet military in Afghanistan to the behaviour of our military raises some question marks. The Soviet military was not under the command of a democratic government. There is much more oversight in regard to our military.

Comparing Afghanistan to Northern Ireland raises some questions as well. It is certainly an interesting topic of discussion, but I do not think that we should not be making these broad comparisons back and forth.

What I would really like to know is his party's real position on Afghanistan, because in my riding people think that the NDP stands for closing the door, turning the key and leaving tomorrow morning. I am not getting that sense any more in listening to the hon. member. I heard the previous hon. member from the NDP talk about a safe transitional withdrawal. I have a feeling that the hon. members of the NDP are starting to muddy the waters a bit. I am quite concerned about that.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I think the waters that are muddied are between the Liberals and the Conservatives in terms of what this resolution actually says and where it is going to take us. We have never said to cut and run. We have never said to walk away. We have never said to leave Afghanistan to whatever comes next. We have never said that—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: That's what people think.

Mr. Tony Martin: That is what people think because that is what the Liberals tell people we are saying. That is what the media tells people that we are saying. That is what the Conservatives tell people that we are saying. That is not what we are saying.

As I suggested this morning when I presented my case before the House, people need to listen thoughtfully, in a reflective way, to what I have to say, and also respectfully, so that they might understand what we are saying and how important it is that we look at places in the world where in fact reconciliation has happened and negotiation has been successful, such as Northern Ireland.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member is in regard to the NDP's position that we should immediately and completely withdraw our military forces from Afghanistan. The NDP's position is that we unilaterally and immediately withdraw all of these forces.

One of two things would follow from that. Either we would leave our diplomatic and development workers in Afghanistan to face a very uncertain security situation or, in the interests of their own security, we would withdraw our diplomats and development aid workers and return to a policy of isolationism.

I do not see the logic in the NDP's position. It entails either a policy of isolationism, where we are not engaged with diplomacy, defence or development work or, on the other hand, it means we are going to attempt naively to try to accomplish development work and diplomacy without defence.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that the member was obviously not listening to what I had to say. He was obviously not listening to the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, who spoke earlier this morning, or to many of my colleagues who have stood to say that we are not talking about abandoning Afghanistan.

We are talking about changing the mission and turning it over to leadership by the United Nations, whereby organizations such as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, the UN development program, peace-building commissioners, et cetera, could be brought to the table. Those resources, with their values, could be used to actually bring some resolution that would get us to peace, liberty and freedom in Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to this very important motion. In a way, this is a historic occasion for the House of Commons as it debates a mission to determine whether it should be extended or not, and above all, whether it should be modified.

About a year ago, I attended a discussion on the Afghanistan mission, which was being held across the street at the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. On the panel were representatives from the Canadian military, the RCMP and the Canadian Red Cross and they all made good points.

Government Orders

What was interesting to me, and I hope my friend from Sault Ste. Marie will take notice, was when a member from the Red Cross, who, I think, was a senior Canadian Red Cross officer who had worked in Afghanistan, said that development work could not be done until security was established and was being maintained and that the non-governmental organizations did not have a peaceful place where they could do development. I think we need to take that into consideration when we consider this motion and we look at what is the best response, the best way to approach it.

I am the first one to thank the hon. John Manley and his colleagues for the report they wrote because it began a lot of very useful debate. In my riding there is no one common position nor, I would say, one favoured position. I am hearing a lot of different views from a lot of people. Some believe we should immediately cease operations and some suggest that we should see it through until the end.

I held two forums a few weeks ago in my riding and used the Manley report as a basis for discussion. I heard from the people in the riding, took their questions and answered as best I could to guide my opinion and guide my actions in Parliament. From that, within our caucus we had a very difficult and prolonged debate on the question of Afghanistan and what should be the Canadian position or the Liberal Party position. I am very pleased with what we came out with. Our leader put forward the amendments to the original Conservative motion. I think those amendments satisfied, in a responsible way, the concerns that I heard from the people in my riding. Again, not all people will be happy.

I want to tell members of the House that I am absolutely insulted when supporters of the mission point to people who do not support the mission and call on them to support the troops. Supporting the troops and supporting the decisions of government are two completely different things.

One can disagree with one's political masters and be supporting the troops. I was part of the cabinet that originally sent our troops into that region post-9/11. Canadians have a right to disagree with the decision that I made, but they are, and I see it from one end of the country to the other, fully supportive of our men and women in uniform who are serving abroad.

This all started, we we all remember, with 9/11. It is important to remind ourselves of how we got ourselves into this position and how we came to have Canadians on the ground in Afghanistan. One of our NATO partners was attacked on 9/11.

Canada is a huge country with a small population. We will never be able to defend our own security alone. We will always depend on alliances, such as NATO, the United Nations, Norad, all the international bodies that we work with, to promote security and provide for our defence. For me, NATO is the best example. It has worked very well since the second world war. It faces some challenges but it has worked very well.

One of our NATO allies was attacked with the bombing of the towers, the attack on the Pentagon and the other plane that was lost which was supposed to be going to Washington also. They were attacked by a group of terrorists who were given safe haven by a nation state in Afghanistan. The Taliban provided support to al-

Qaeda operating out of its country and it refused to turn over al-Qaeda after the attack. It continued to defend al-Qaeda and the Americans, therefore, chose to attack that state.

To me, there was no decision and no choice, We are a member of NATO and the creed of NATO is that if one nation is attacked we are all attacked and we respond. So we went into Afghanistan.

Members may remember that around the same time not too long ago we were having the same sort of debate as to whether we would go to Iraq. Neither I nor the House supported going to Iraq. Some members in the House would have gone but, based on the same judgment, the same evaluation and the information provided, we did not go. I think the member for Sault Ste. Marie raised a lot of points that needed to be considered before going into an armed conflict.

• (1250)

However, we are in Afghanistan and we have destabilized the Taliban government. We are now in the position where, if we were to leave, we would create a void, not just us but NATO, and all those people we helped and who helped us and who cooperated with us would be left unprotected. I believe there would be a slaughter there and heads would literally roll.

Therefore, for me, to immediately leave Afghanistan is not a question. I think that is the NDP position and I cannot support that.

I felt that the Conservative position in the original motion put forward was also stupid on many levels, the first being that it had no change in the mission and we could not foresee an end. There was no way to measure the goal as to where we were going.

However, the most stupid part of the motion was that the Minister of Defence told the House that he was looking for people to replace us. He said that he was calling on NATO for some assistance in the region but, at the same time, there was a non-confidence motion in the House on continuing the mission. That was not putting a lot of pressure on our allies within NATO because they knew that if he lost the motion they did not have to worry too much about it because there would be an election anyway in Canada, and if he won the motion, then we would be staying there. So that did not work.

We put forward an amendment to the motion, which I thought was responsible, and the government changed its motion in accordance to the amendment put forward by our leader.

At the end of the day, we have the NDP that would cut and run out of Afghanistan and the Conservatives who would cut and paste from our motion. The cut and paste works for me.

The amendment does a couple of the essential things that we wanted. It tells Canadians when our troops will be out of Kandahar and it gives us an end date. It also changes the mission. Those things need to work together. We cannot leave Afghanistan until we have established some security that will permit the treaty approach to work. We will then have additional development and better diplomacy.

Government Orders

The motion mentions that included in that security is the improvement of their armed forces, their police, their justice system and their corrections system so they can have some elements of democracy. We cannot expect that in two, three or ten years they will have a system that will parallel ours or that will be equal to ours. Our system is a lot better than it was 50 years ago but in 50 years Canadians will think we were Neanderthals because they will have improved the institutions of democracy some more. I have confidence in that. It will be the job of these pages, as they go forward, to make those improvements.

One of the things I discussed when I held those forums was whether this was a discussion for Parliament. As a take note debate for informing government, I think we would all agree it is. Some, myself being maybe the last Neanderthal in that respect, do not believe that sending soldiers into war is a decision of Parliament. The government must make those decisions. However, there can be discussions and it can be informed by Parliament but, at the end of the day, I do not see a member in the House who has the information required to decide if this mission can be successful, what it takes for that mission or how long it should be.

The government cannot tell me, and it should not tell me, all the secret information that is available to the Chief of Defence Staff, to the Minister of Defence, to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Telling me would indicate to our enemies how the information gets to us. It would put our allies and our troops at risk and would not help but hinder us. However, I am one of the few who thinks that way. Even at those forums I made the suggestion that such an important decision should be put forward in a referendum, that it should be the most direct of democracies and that a lot of the information for those who wish to be informed can be informed.

We had good discussions. We did not have 100% agreement in any area but people brought those ideas forward and defended them quite well.

●(1255)

As I mentioned previously, I was uncomfortable with the original position of my party and, before we introduced the amendment, we had a lot of suggestions.

One of the things that is important is that we are not telling the military how to do its operation. We tell them the objective and the goal and the Chief of Defence Staff and his subordinates do what they need to do to carry it out.

We wanted to go to more of a security mission rather than a search and destroy but what do we need to do to provide security to a region? If it means doing some sorties and taking out the threat wherever it may exist, that is a decision for the military, not for politicians.

Our decision as politicians should be setting the goal of the mission. The Chief of Defence Staff should tell us what he needs to do it, whether the objective that we have given him is possible, whether it can be achieved, yes or no, and, if it can, what they need to do it. We then come to a decision as to whether we can provide what is needed.

That being said, the rest of it is out of the hands of politicians.

What is important, and it is mentioned in the motion, is transparency, which is part of Manley's report and part of our amendment. Canadians, through its institutions, need to be aware of how the mission is proceeding, not the secret elements, but they do need to know. That is part of the Manley report and part of the motion and we are hoping that it will be respected.

If we look at the newspapers today, we will see that on the question of detainees, commissions need to be set up that will cost \$2 million to get the information that the government could readily hand over but is refusing. We see that in *Le Devoir* and the *Globe and Mail* and it is unacceptable. The government must take that transparency element responsibly.

One of the things that needs to be considered when the Chief of Defence Staff does a mission like this, or the government, is the ability of the Taliban and al-Qaeda to resupply. We need to know who is supplying them and whether we can we cut those areas off. We also need to know what we need from the other countries that are helping us, the other countries in the region. We also need to know our diplomatic role. Maybe we need to increase our diplomatic role in that region and, hopefully, we will see that flow through. That was also talked about in the Manley report.

Other elements that often come when we have a mission of this importance is the management of the mission, and that is an area in which government does have a role. We need to ensure that we are administering our operations in an area like that in a responsible manner.

I do not have all the answers and I do not know what we need, but I remember a while back reading in the paper that we needed tanks over there. I still have difficulty understanding that because we are not facing tanks or artillery. We are facing arms, but we are facing mostly terrorism-type arms. However, we sent tanks over and then decided we needed to rent a bunch of second-hand tanks from European countries because they were necessary for Afghanistan. That was a very expensive procurement project. I read later on that those tanks would not be available during the mission. Some of them would be repaired rather quickly but it would still be two or three years before we would get them.

Those are questions that can be better handled by the parliamentary committee. In true transparency, those questions can be brought forward and we can be advised on them. Maybe there are legitimate answers, but it seems unreasonable that we are in a position like that.

We also have the question of the cost. I read in the paper this week, as we would all have, that we were \$1 billion over budget on the Afghan effort. The difficult discussion for me is not on the money. The difficult discussion is on whether or not we send our troops into battle.

If we decide to send the troops into battle, I hope the questions I posed as to whether we can achieve our mission and whether we have what is necessary to do the mission will have been properly answered. And, if we do make the commitment, we must supply our troops with whatever they need, at whatever cost.

Government Orders

However, it is the responsibility of the government to tell Canadians as it comes along. We can be surprised by \$10 million but we should not be surprised by \$1 billion. We need to know the ongoing cost, whether we have prepared and budgeted for it and what we will need to do in the future to sustain these activities.

•(1300)

They will not get cheaper by 2011 and 2012. Do we have the resources? I saw the budgets lately. As a result of the choices made by the two previous governments and by the Minister of Finance, the fiscal latitude within the budget is very slim. We are getting near a deficit. Do we have the ability to finance this further? Do we have the ability to finance supplies? Can this lead us toward a deficit?

Another question was raised about the 1,000 troops. Where did that number come from? Is it exactly 1,000? I do not have confidence that 1,000 troops are enough, but I understand from the report that this is the minimum requirement. Where are we with that?

We have been asking the government for over a year to advise NATO that the end of our term was coming up and that it should be making arrangements for our replacement. The government completely refused. It has now brought forward a motion indicating that we will remain there, in some capacity, for the next two years.

We still do not know what country is going to provide those troops in Kandahar. The newspapers indicate that France is willing to send more people, but I understand they will be sent to eastern Afghanistan where it already has some assets rather than the Kandahar region.

Good management requires transparency. The government cannot bring these matters to the House half-heartedly. The government has placed this motion before the House, so that the House can take responsibility for extending the mission, but it has not given us any information. At least we have a reasonable time for debate. The first time the government did this, we had three hours of debate.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: How many debates did you give us? Zero.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I am getting questions before the allotted period.

•(1305)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for West Nova will have an opportunity to answer questions and comments in about three minutes when his speech is finished.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to the questions so I may wrap up early.

The member raised the point that when we were in government, the decisions were taken by the government and not the House, and that is true. Take note debates were held in the House on these missions and the government was advised accordingly.

I would argue, as I did earlier, that this is the responsible way to do it. The government can be informed by the House as it can by the committees, but the responsibility at the end of the day is one of the government. One can delegate authority but never responsibility.

I watched the Prime Minister try to duck and dive and say that Professor Johnston will look at the terms of the Schreiber inquiry and he will accept the terms. The Prime Minister named the commissioner. The Prime Minister indicates the terms of a public inquiry. That is the law in Canada.

An activity of the military is a responsibility of the government. The government administers and manages. The minister of national defence, the minister of external affairs, the cabinet, and the prime minister in some governments get involved. I doubt if we could get that many people involved in the decisions under the current circumstances, but it is a government decision. That is the way it is done.

There should be transparency, a review by parliament, questioning by parliament, and work by committees. That is the logical way to approach these things.

I will be supporting the motion on the understanding that there will be a change in the way the mission operates, a change toward security, an end date for Canadians to leave, turning over responsibilities to other nations for the more active combat role, doing some training for the institutions required for security within Afghanistan, and permitting development and diplomacy to take place so that enduring peace can be achieved for Afghanistan, particularly the Kandahar region.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are a few things that the member and I are a little fuzzy on, but I think we agree on most things.

My colleague talked about the House informing the government and so on. I would like to point out that we will have had 30 hours of debate on this issue, with more than 100 people debating. Nobody can say that we have not been open and transparent in allowing people to comment on the mission.

There have been 15 technical briefings on this mission since 2002, 14 by this government and one by the Liberals when they were government. Our ministers of national defence have made 17 appearances before parliamentary committees, so nobody can say we have not done that.

With respect to the military police complaints commission, it has been given access to everything, whether by subpoena or whether asked. There is no difference. This is the political agenda of somebody else and I think I know where it is coming from.

With respect to the tanks, they were sent there to save Canadian lives and Afghan lives, and they have done that. The original Leopards lacked cooling and lacked some other things. Those have been replaced by the tanks we have initially rented. These tanks are doing a great job. The longer term acquisition of tanks takes a while. It is a good program.

We are talking about changing the mission. We have been doing the training and development all the way along. It has been accelerating as we have gone along, but it needs to accelerate more. That is why we are doing that. Somebody else gets to vote on how that is conducted and that is the Taliban.

Government Orders

I would like to ask my hon. colleague, how does he view the Taliban's participation in this whole project and the influence it will have on how we conduct our mission?

• (1310)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I remind the member that the question of transparency is not necessarily the appearance of a minister but the willing participation of the same and telling the truth. The Minister of National Defence had to be changed and had to apologize for misleading the House.

On the question of the detainees, we have had a lot of misinformation and a lot had to change. That is not what I would call transparency.

On the question of the Taliban, I had difficulty providing support. It was in the media that I had difficulty when the position was taken that we would take a non-combat role. I could not explain to anybody what a non-combat role in a theatre of war meant when the people we are up against are armed.

That is why I am much more comfortable with the amendment to the motion that was proposed by my party's leader that talks about increasing the role of security but leaving the operational matters to the military on the ground. Whatever it has to do to provide security there, that is the military's responsibility. It is not a political decision.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am cognizant of the fact that I am participating in the debate in a week when we have lost the 80th soldier, so let me begin by acknowledging the dedication and courage of the men and women in the Canadian Forces, and to express my sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who have died.

The debate that is currently before the House is one that none of us are participating in lightly. When we are asking Canadians to put their lives on the line, it is imperative that we go into this afternoon's vote, on the motion that is before us, after having deliberated on all of the opinions that have been expressed not just in this country and in the House but, indeed, right across the world.

Just yesterday in the foreign affairs committee, Mr. Manley appeared and made it quite clear that even he agreed, and he is the author of the commission obviously, that the conflict in that region would not be resolved militarily, that we need to seek a diplomatic end. Similarly, President Karzai, Afghan parliamentarians, and aid groups have all spoken of the need to kickstart dialogue to bring about a lasting peace.

Sixty-five per cent of Afghans say that disarmament is the most important step toward improving security in Afghanistan. Even the former deputy minister of foreign affairs, Gordon Smith, recently said, "What is needed is a process of substantial conversion or reorientation of anti-state elements into an open and non-violent political dynamic".

In light of the fact that there is a widespread consensus that the counterinsurgency mission is not able to create the conditions that bring about security and stability or to improve the lives of the Afghan people, I have to ask the member opposite, why would he call on Canada to continue on the path of war instead of joining with us in the NDP in our call to build a new path to a lasting peace and security?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I have to live in this universe. I do not know that universe. I do not know about the black hole that one goes through and finds on the other side where everybody is perfect, where we talk to the Taliban, and they agree that they will no longer have a fundamentalist, religious government where they do not give rights to everybody in their country, the women and children, that they will be peaceful, that everything will be good, and that the warlords will not try to make millions and billions of dollars through the production of heroin. I do not understand that world.

What I know is that members of Parliament have a responsibility for the security of our country. That is done through international organizations like NATO. We have a responsibility to the people of Afghanistan because of the destabilization in their country. If we take the military role out of Afghanistan, there will be a slaughter of all those who helped us in trying to change their country. I understand that.

We have a responsibility to NATO and to our fighting women and men who are in Afghanistan, so we must take a reasoned approach. After a lot of debate in my caucus and more debate in the House, this motion is the best way that we can achieve long term peace and stability in that region of the world.

• (1315)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague on his fine speech.

Our hearts go out to the families of the recently deceased Canadian Forces members. On behalf of all of us, I echo my colleague from the NDP that we are all deeply appreciative and most grateful for the heroic efforts of our Canadian Forces members in Afghanistan.

For the last two years many of the essential issues with respect to Afghanistan have not been dealt with: the internal political reformation that has to occur between tribes; an integrated regional working group that involves Iran, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and the CIS states; an absence of focus on the part of CIDA; the fact that some of the four pillars of Afghanistan security have to be dealt with, which I believe are an end point, namely, Afghanistan police, army, judiciary and corrections; and finally, whether personnel are sufficient in number, have sufficient training and sufficient pay. Why on earth these have been left in limbo, to not be touched, is an affront to the mission, an affront to our troops, and an affront to NATO.

The facts show that over the last two years our government has not pulled its weight in NATO and pushed our NATO partners to do what is required on the other elements. While our troops are out there spilling their blood on the ground to do their very best, which they have done, the other elements of the mission have been shirked and ignored, underfunded and unfocused without any adequate planning.

Government Orders

I ask my colleague, while we have worked together well to implement a motion that will be passed, that will be focused, that will deal with a realistic outcome, which is to enable the Afghan people to take charge of their own security so Afghanistan in the end will be ultimately what the Afghan people want it to be, does he not think that the government should focus on all of the pillars of Afghan security and development, and put the feet to the fire of not only NATO but also Mr. Karzai's government and the culture of impunity and corruption that has to be dealt with?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, what is raised by the member are those elements we have to work toward if we want that long term peace and security, not just in Afghanistan, but in the region.

Mr. Manley speaks of a senior envoy in the region where people in the region would know that this person would represent the interests of Canada. He would be the Prime Minister's envoy, and if he were meeting with the leadership, they would understand that all the powers that he needs were with him to achieve those things. So, if they require assistance, if they want Canada's participation, there would be minimum requirements.

One of the areas that continues to be an issue is the treatment by Afghanistan of the detainees. It is not acceptable to Canadians that Canadian soldiers risk their lives, capture these Taliban insurgents, treat them decently, turn them over to the correctional system, and then they are treated below the standards acceptable to the Canadian military or the Canadian people. That would be another example.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

I rise today to support the motion regarding Canada's future role in Afghanistan. It is not a Liberal or Conservative motion. It is a Canadian motion. It sets out the mandate to our allies, to the Afghan people and to our Canadian Forces.

The motion reaffirms Canada's position as a leader among the community of nations. To be sure, Canada is not the only leader among the community of nations, but it can certainly count itself as one of the world's leading nations. That is why we are one of the 50 founding members of the United Nations and one of the 12 founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. That is why we are one of the 19 founding members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. That is why we are a member of the G-8.

With leadership, comes responsibility, for responsibility is the price of leadership, a responsibility to be engaged in world affairs, a responsibility to multilateral engagement, a responsibility to the United Nations, a responsibility to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a responsibility to give generously of our foreign aid, a responsibility to our citizens to protect their security and many would add, a responsibility to protect. This is the price of being a world leader. That is why Canada is the second largest contributor to the Commonwealth and the second largest contributor to la Francophonie. That is why Canada is the seventh largest contributor to the regular budget of the United Nations. That is why over decades Canada has contributed thousands of soldiers to peace-keeping operations in dozens of United Nations led missions.

Canada is a leader in the world and with this leadership, comes responsibility. We have a responsibility to the United Nations to be in Afghanistan. Our mission in Afghanistan operates under a number of UN resolutions, the primary one of which is resolution 1267, which demands that the Taliban ceases activities and support of international terrorism. This UN resolution has been subsequently supported and reinforced by other UN resolutions, including resolution 1333 in the year 2000, resolution 1390 in 2002, resolution 1455 in 2003, resolution 1526 in 2004, resolution 1617 in 2005 and resolution 1735 in 2006.

The United Nations has not just passed one or two resolutions, but a total of seven resolutions on Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

As a founding member of the United Nations, we have a responsibility to uphold these UN resolutions. That is why we are in Afghanistan.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Canada is a leader in the world and with leadership, comes responsibility. We have a responsibility to NATO to be in Afghanistan.

On April 4, 1949, Canada agreed to article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty which states:

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

On September 11, 2001, the United States, a NATO member, was attacked by an al-Qaeda cell supported by the Taliban in Afghanistan. On March 11, 2004, another NATO member was attacked by an al-Qaeda inspired terrorist cell when the Madrid subway system was bombed. On July 7, 2005, the United Kingdom, yet still another NATO member, was attacked when another al-Qaeda inspired terrorist cell bombed the Tube.

Article 5 states that an attack against one member shall be considered an attack against all NATO members Article 5 also states that each NATO member has an obligation to assist the member attacked and to take any and all means necessary, including force, to restore and maintain the security of North America and Europe.

Canada's word and its honour is in that NATO treaty. The word and honour of Canadians long gone is in that treaty. On April 4, 1949, those Canadians stood for Canada. They gave Canada's solemn word to uphold article 5. We must uphold article 5 or else we forgo our own word and our own honour and our word and our honour means little.

Government Orders

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

As founding members of NATO, we have a responsibility to support article 5 of the treaty, and that is why we are in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

As Canadians, we lead the world in terms of social outcomes and wealth. Canadians live in one of the wealthiest societies in the world. With wealth and leadership, come responsibility, responsibility to give generously of our foreign aid. Canada ranks among Afghanistan's top five donors, and Afghanistan is the single largest recipient nation of Canadian aid.

Over the 10 year period from 2001 to 2011, Canada will have contributed over \$1 billion in aid. This aid assists Afghans as they seek to rebuild shattered dreams and lives, disrupted by decades of violence.

We live in one of the wealthiest nations of the world and wealthy nations have a responsibility to provide foreign aid to impoverished nations. Afghanistan is one of the most impoverished nations in the world, and that is why we are in Afghanistan. None of this aid is possible without the security and defence provided by Canadian Forces, and that is why the Canadian Forces are in Afghanistan.

We, as the elected representatives of the Canadian people in the House of Commons, are here to provide leadership. With this leadership, comes a responsibility to ensure the security of our citizens, a responsibility to protect our citizens from threats both domestic and foreign and a responsibility to protect our citizens from terrorist threats.

In the years leading up to 2001 the Taliban in Afghanistan provided a safe haven to the al-Qaeda network, which used Afghanistan to plan, to train and to deploy their attacks. We are in Afghanistan today to ensure that a Taliban government cannot return to provide a safe haven for groups like al-Qaeda to plan, train and launch their attacks on Canadian soil and on Canadian citizens.

[*Translation*]

As the elected leaders of Canada, we have a responsibility to protect Canadians and lower the risk of a terrorist group based in Afghanistan striking here and endangering our citizens. That is why we are in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

The number of years we have been involved, the price we have paid in lives, the moneys we have spent on defence, the moneys we have spent on aid should not weaken our resolve. Success in Afghanistan will not be easy. Debates will continue, arguments will be considered, solutions will be put forward. It is essential that we uphold our responsibilities to this world, for Canadians are leaders in the world and the price of leadership is responsibility.

We must all uphold our responsibilities to the United Nations, to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to the people of Afghanistan and to Canadians. These are the reasons why we are in Afghanistan and that is why the motion in front of the House today should be supported.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his dissertation on the reasons why we went to Afghanistan. I will not question his research on that topic because it seems to be fairly inclusive as to the details of why we went into Afghanistan, and that is an important point.

It is not the point we are debating today. The purpose of this discussion is whether we should stay on in Afghanistan. To equate the actions of a shadowy group such as al-Qaeda with its relationship to the tragic events of 2001 with the continued pursuit of a section of the Afghanistan cultural makeup, and the Pashtun and the Taliban are a part of that, is not really germane.

The germane issue is whether we should remain in Afghanistan. Regardless of why Canada went there, we have to assess the need for Canada's action there now.

How does my colleague reconcile the continued pursuit of a UN and a NATO obligation to deal in the past with what—

• (1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I have outlined three reasons why we are in Afghanistan and why we should remain in Afghanistan.

The first reason is our commitment to the United Nations, which has passed seven resolutions with respect to Afghanistan. We have an obligation, as one of the founding members of the United Nations, to support the resolutions that have been duly passed.

The second reason is we are a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Article 5 of that treaty obliges us to go to the support of other NATO members.

The third reason why we are in Afghanistan is because Canada is one of the wealthiest, richest nations among the community of nations in this world. As such, we have a responsibility to deliver foreign aid. Foreign aid cannot be delivered in Afghanistan without security. We must deliver diplomacy and development with defence. We cannot deliver diplomacy and development work without defence. That is the third reason why we are in Afghanistan.

Those are three very solid reasons why we must continue our mission in Afghanistan and why we must continue to assist those in the world much less fortunate than us.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions for my colleague.

If we were interested in saving lives and putting the responsibility to protect something as more than a tome and series of words, but breathing life into it, we would be in the Congo. Every month 30,000 people are being slaughtered, gang raped and mutilated. The mass murder of civilians occurs month in and month out, and the government has done nothing.

Government Orders

Perhaps we would be in Zimbabwe wherein living conditions have plummeted. That country now has the lowest lifespan in the world. The average woman lives to a mere 34 years and a man 37 years. What has the Canadian government done? Nothing. It has ignored Zimbabwe completely, while people are dying of preventable causes.

If Canada were interested in terrorism, al-Qaeda has not been in Afghanistan for years. We find the al-Qaeda in the Horn of Africa, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, North Africa and Algeria.

Why does the member's government not start to make a full court press with other international partners to deal with the underlying issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the support for repressive regimes in the Middle East, and why is the influence of the Taliban increasing, not decreasing?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, the reason Canada is in Afghanistan is to ensure that a government friendly to an organization like al-Qaeda does not return to power. The al-Qaeda networks, as the member points out, are largely absent from Afghanistan in terms of being able to plan, train and launch their attacks, precisely because NATO is engaged in Afghanistan. If NATO were to leave, I have no doubt that a power vacuum would arise and that we would quite quickly see the rise of terrorist inspired networks.

The other thing I would add with respect to other conflicts around the world, like the conflict in Darfur, and issues around the government of Zimbabwe, is that Canada's resources are stretched. We cannot possibly be in all places at once at this juncture in our history.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this historic debate, a debate about something as fundamental as whether or not Canada should be involved on a combat basis in Afghanistan. I am glad we are having a debate. I may not agree with the Conservatives' position or the Liberals' position, but I am cognizant of the fact that this is a historic moment, something we had sought to achieve for many years with respect to the Liberal government when it was in power.

When the Liberal government first made its decision to send troops to Afghanistan, did we have a vote in this place? No. When it made decisions to send more troops into Kandahar, did we have a vote in this place? No. It took constant pressure before we even had a take note debate.

I thank the Conservatives, on behalf of Canadians, for allowing the views of Canadians to be heard through their representatives on something as fundamental as Canada's involvement in a war.

This issue goes to the heart of who we are as Canadians. It shows that in fact there are many different views that have to be respected. There is not one voice in this country demanding that we simply salute the government, send off our troops and say everything is fine. We are a critical nation. We are a nation that gets to the root of problems and we look for alternative solutions. We are also a nation that has a long historic tradition of peace building, peacemaking and peacekeeping.

Canadians are really concerned about what is at stake today. What is the government up to with respect to this motion before the House? Why are we extending the mission to 2011? Why are we not looking at alternatives that would in fact bring true peace to the region and would deal with some of the root causes of conflict, discontent and deprivation in the region?

I want to mention at the very outset that just because we are in opposition to the position taken by the Conservatives and the Liberals, it does not mean that we do not support our troops.

I want to make it very clear first of all that I regret the kind of heckling we have heard through some of this debate. I am glad that no one is heckling me right now and I hope no one does for the next 10 minutes. I was disturbed to hear the kind of heckling and the suggestion that New Democrats do not support our troops and somehow that we were less than Canadian and had less than strong Canadian values.

We bring our critical analysis to this issue and we have very good reasons for our position, but that does not mean we do not support our troops. We do.

In fact we stood in Manitoba as some 800 troops based in Shilo, Manitoba got ready to go into the battlefields of Kandahar. Just one month ago we saw 70 soldiers, mainly from Manitoba, leave Shilo and head for Kandahar. There are another 650 or 700 troops ready to leave Manitoba who have prepared for this day and who are off to Kandahar.

We worry about their future. We worry about the kind of risks they are putting their own lives through. We worry about the families who are left behind and the anxiety and fears they go through every single day. We support our troops and recognize that they have made a decision to take on this career and to be faithful to their country as their oath implies.

Let it not be said that we have any less commitment to our troops. In fact, all of us in the New Democratic Party and everywhere in the House have gone to events to support our troops. We have signed the yellow ribbons, have sent messages of support, have prayed with the families, and have mourned the loss of loved ones. We are there every step of the way, just as we are there for our veterans and the members of our legions right across the country.

This does not mean we support our veterans any less than anyone else in this place. This does not mean we are not there remembering our past and the valour of the soldiers who came before.

In fact I want the House to know that if it were not for my father entering World War II and putting his own life on the line, I would not be here today. I have a very valiant father. He took part in World War II, as a member of the Governor General's Horse Guards. He came up through Italy into Holland and there he met my mother during the liberation of Holland. As a result, I am here and so are five other kids. We are very grateful for the valour of my father and others like him.

Government Orders

• (1335)

That does not mean that my father, a veteran today, and other veterans like him and members in legions everywhere are not questioning the role of Canada in Kandahar, the role of Canada in Afghanistan. Everybody everywhere is questioning the policy and wondering whether or not it makes sense.

There are people on all sides of the issue. There is not a one-dimensional, homogeneous response to the situation. This is about people actually using their wisdom and experience and questioning what makes sense. They are saying that given what we know about Afghanistan and Kandahar, it does not make sense for Canada to be in Afghanistan, and it makes absolutely no sense for Canada to be there until 2011.

My goodness, we know of the dangers every day. We are now up to 80 deaths of Canadian soldiers from this conflict in Afghanistan. That is an incredibly high toll. How many more will die? How many more will suffer injuries or face disabilities? Hundreds and hundreds of soldiers are coming back to this country with very significant disabilities, suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, physical disabilities, mental disabilities.

We are creating a huge problem. I know the government says that it is trying hard to respond to those needs, but we are not able to address the full range of needs of soldiers who are coming back with disabilities, injuries and problems from their participation in Afghanistan.

Of course there are veterans and legion members are asking questions about the government's positions. The government tries to rationalize its position on the war, but it will not even care for the veterans and veterans' wives in this country. We dealt with this in the House recently. We heard that in the budget the government was going to supposedly fix the veterans independence program. What did it do? It opened the door just a crack so a few more widows could get coverage, but it left a whole range of widows without access to the veterans independence program.

Joyce Carter will not mince words when it comes to the promise of the government and how it could not even keep the promise it made in the last election to ensure that all veterans and veterans' widows would be able to access the VIP. A meagre little step was taken in the budget to try to camouflage the issue and pretend that the government is doing something. People expected some genuine response.

Every single day we are dealing with the outcome of the war in Afghanistan and problems which are not being addressed by the government. Look at what we dealt with yesterday on the whole question of transparency around the costs to Canadians. The government cannot even be forthcoming to Canadians about how much the war is actually costing. It would not verify the information received through a freedom of information request that the cost overrun for our involvement in Afghanistan this year alone is close to \$1 billion. We are approaching \$10 billion as an overall budget for our participation in Afghanistan.

That is a lot of money, especially when we consider the priorities, needs and demands of people in this nation. There are people living in third world conditions on reserves. The Conservative government,

like the Liberal government before it, could not even find a way to support children who are now turning to suicide and suffering severe mental health problems.

I am certainly saddened today that the Liberals have decided to cave in and to lose sight of what is at stake here. I am saddened that they are going along with this motion from the Conservatives. I wish the Liberals had been true to their principles and true to their stated beliefs from the past number of years, at least as I understood them, although there is some confusion and grey area around Liberal decision making these days.

What we need in this whole situation where we do not dismiss the problems in Afghanistan is, quite simply, a new approach. I ask members to look at the amendment we proposed. It is a constructive amendment. Members will be able to vote on it. People will see the vote tonight. It is an amendment that says let us look for a more responsible, reasonable approach to the situation in Afghanistan.

• (1340)

We say that there are two paths to choose from. We can choose going on with prolonging the war, or we can choose to build a path toward peace. For the NDP, it is a choice between war and peace.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech given by my hon. NDP colleague. I listened carefully, but I have a very hard time understanding the NDP's position. I do not know if this demagoguery is intentional or not.

We are talking about a combat mission. Very quickly, excluding those who were killed on the road, by stepping on or driving over a mine, whether improvised or not, how many Canadian soldiers have been killed in combat over the last year?

• (1345)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Conservative colleague for his question.

I must say that the NDP position is very clear and evident from the wording of the amendment now before this House. Here is an excerpt:

That the House call upon the government to begin preparations for the safe withdrawal of Canadian soldiers from the combat mission in Afghanistan with no further mission extensions;

that, in the opinion of the House, the government should engage in a robust diplomatic process to prepare the groundwork for a political solution, under explicit UN direction and authority, engaging both regional and local stakeholders and ensuring the full respect for international human rights and humanitarian law;

[*English*]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague has great knowledge, having been to Afghanistan and having studied very closely what is happening at the community level.

Government Orders

She may know that the minister of community development established the national solidarity program. During that program's implementation over five years, water purification, the funding of co-ops for agricultural transformation, local auxiliary police training, and revamping community medical clinics have transpired. That same minister is now the minister of education. He has set the goal to bring education and training to all of the very remote communities of Afghanistan.

Is that not a laudable goal at the community level, an approach that works? That same minister has said that the presence of troops is necessary to secure peace in order for that program to be successful. Does the member agree with that?

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I have to tell my colleague that I have never been to Afghanistan. I wish I had so I could see firsthand what is happening, but I must rely on the good information of my colleagues, like the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam in British Columbia, who is our party's defence critic and has given us very accurate reports.

She and others will repeat over and over that, yes, aid and international development projects are important to the people of Afghanistan, but at the rate we are going, we are not going to be able to make a difference or stop the despair and destruction that is happening in that country. We are talking about a ratio of 10:1; for every \$10 spent on military activities and countering the insurgents, we are spending \$1 on aid.

If we could put some of that money toward international aid and development, we could multiply what the member is talking about. We could make a real difference if we could get some of this money and involve the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, the UN Development Programme, the Peace-building Commission, all of these organizations that are determined to make a difference.

We could make such a difference, if we only had a new approach and a different set of priorities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part today in this debate on Afghanistan. It is a debate that will have significant impact on future generations, the direction of future international relations, and determining the role that Canada should play in our relations with other states with respect to a process that requires that there first be peace.

Today, as the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, I have the pleasure of rising in this House on behalf of the approximately 105,000 citizens whom I represent and proudly opposing the extension of this mission which, we believe, should end in February 2009.

This is not the first time we have had such emotional debates in this House. I remember the debate about whether or not Canada should participate in the war in Iraq. The Bloc Québécois was the political party in this House that was vigorously opposed to Canadian participation in the Iraq conflict.

I also remember the vote of May 17, 2006, on whether or not to extend the mission in Afghanistan by two years. I remember that in

the hours before the vote, I asked myself four questions. Although they were simple questions, they allowed me, as a parliamentarian, to take a decision on whether or not we should extend the mission.

The first question I asked myself on May 17, 2006, was: is Canada's intervention justified, realistic and useful? My second question before voting on May 17, 2006, was: what is the exact nature of Canada's commitment—military or humanitarian? The third question I asked myself on May 17, 2006, was: are the people who are going to risk their lives appropriately equipped to succeed at the mission we want to give them? And the fourth question was: is there a specific strategy for this mission?

Those were the questions I asked myself, as a parliamentarian, before voting in this House on the need to extend the mission in Afghanistan by two years. What was the answer from the Bloc Québécois and the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie? The answer was no to extending the mission.

In reading the questions we asked ourselves at the time of the vote, we find they are echoed in a certain number of reports—published today—on the progress of this mission. The Manley report is very critical of this government's military approach. It clearly says:

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

Accordingly, our concerns of May 2006, have been validated by the Manley report, which recognizes that there is an imbalance between the military and humanitarian aspects.

In the meantime, should we do nothing? No. We should send a clear message in this House that this mission must end in February 2009. We must pressure this government to take some decisions. First, the government must advise its NATO allies of its intention to withdraw from Afghanistan in February 2009. The message to our allies must be clear. There is no room for compromise.

● (1350)

Canada will leave Afghanistan in February 2009, and our NATO allies need to be informed as quickly as possible.

Second, we need an exit plan. The government must develop a plan, because we cannot just pick up and leave Afghanistan, as though we are packing up our tent after a weekend at Mont Tremblant. That is not what we should do. A responsible government must immediately present a plan for the withdrawal of our troops in February 2009.

Third, in the meantime, we must rebalance the mission to put more emphasis on development assistance resources. According to DND reports, the operating costs for Canada's mission in Afghanistan are upwards of \$7.718 million, from 2001 to 2008. We need to reallocate this money to humanitarian assistance. We need to develop capacities for the citizens and for civilian populations. We need to give them the means. In so doing, we will not only succeed in transferring and giving capacities to Afghanistan, but by transferring the money from the military sector to the humanitarian sector, we will also most certainly be able to meet the objective of 0.7% of the GDP for development assistance. This is yet another commitment that Canada is not currently fulfilling.

We must therefore inform our NATO allies that we want to and will withdraw from Afghanistan in February 2009; establish a plan for withdrawal and introduce a plan for immediate withdrawal; transfer and rebalance funding from the military sector to the humanitarian sector; place greater emphasis on diplomacy, because political discussion, dialogue and the exchange of ideas are most certainly where Canada should be focusing its efforts, not only regarding the problems in Afghanistan, but also regarding solutions that Canada should consider to resolve the conflicts.

We must be clear on this. The approach we favour would allow Canada to assume its responsibilities. However, we must bear in mind that there are limits to Canada's responsibilities. Canada's firm commitment, which involves withdrawing from Afghanistan by February 2009, is in our view non negotiable. I would remind the House that the Conservative motion extends the Canadian mission in Kandahar until 2011. In light of the debate here today, we see two forces at work. We see not only the Conservative force, which wants to keep our troops in Afghanistan, but also the Liberal force, which decided to side with the Canadian Conservative military approach in order to resolve this conflict.

I do not think this is the approach that Quebeckers want. We are a peaceful people who wish to see a speedy resolution to the conflicts through dialogue, diplomacy and political discussion.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie will have 10 minutes remaining following oral question period.

We will now move on to statements by members. The hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

GLOBAL CITIZEN WEEK

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have all heard so many times that people want to make a difference, feel like they are part of something and be connected personally to something they can support and care about.

Statements by Members

Last week in my riding this was the key message during Global Citizen Week and it is one that the constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country have taken to heart.

A partnering relationship has been created between Kelowna and the village of Senanga, Zambia. All sectors of our community, from health and education to agriculture and transportation, are sharing their knowledge to help Senanga become a vibrant and economically viable community.

I express congratulations and thanks to all those who are making this global partnership happen, people such as Dr. Nelmes and the many tireless volunteers who are committed to this project.

As Sheila Olcen, chair of the community group, reminds us, it is so important to understand that we are one world and that what we do in our community has an impact on the lives of people thousands of miles away.

* * *

• (1400)

ROSALINDA CANTIVEROS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a distinguished citizen of Winnipeg and of Canada, the late Rosalinda Cantiveros, who died in Winnipeg on March 4.

Linda was a popular leader in the Winnipeg Filipino community and her influence in the city was far reaching.

Arriving in Canada 30 years ago, Linda worked with a host of government and community agencies to provide services to local communities. Linda emerged as one of the pre-eminent leaders of her community.

A teacher in the inner city of Winnipeg, she was the founder and editor-in-chief of the *Filipino Journal*, a founding member of the Filipino-Canada Business Council and president of the Philippine-Canadian Centre of Manitoba. Many acknowledge that her greatest accomplishment was her role in the construction of this centre, now the hub of the community in Manitoba.

Linda was many things to many people: a wife, a mother, an activist, a political candidate, a teacher, and a journalist.

To her husband Rod, her sons Ron and John, and her many family members and friends, we offer our sincerest condolences. Her legacy will endure for decades.

* * *

[Translation]

MORIN HEIGHTS TRAGEDY

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we wish to express our most sincere condolences to the family and friends of the three women who were killed yesterday at their workplace in Morin Heights, Quebec. The victims were Barbara Morrisson Elliott, Sharon Kirkpatrick and her daughter-in-law, Marlyn Osiaza.

Statements by Members

In this day and age, it is essential to bring all of our knowledge to bear to ensure that people are safe in their workplaces. This winter's exceptional snowfall calls for increased vigilance. That is why we are asking those responsible for workplace safety to redouble their efforts. In addition, we are asking the Minister of Public Safety to work closely with all of his provincial counterparts to ensure adequate preparation for the possibility of flooding this spring.

* * *

MAROUANE ABOUDRAZ

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Marouane Aboudraz, his wife and their two sons, aged 3 years and 13 months, left Montreal to visit family in the Gaza Strip in April 2007. The visit was supposed to last a few months, but it turned into a nightmare in June 2007 when Hamas seized control of Gaza, and Israel cut off access to the Palestinian territories, thereby preventing the Aboudraz family from returning home.

The father managed to escape when the border with Egypt opened at the end of January. He was able to return to Montreal, but without his wife and children. The children need asthma medication, but everything has become very scarce in Gaza.

My colleague from Papineau received assurances from the Department of Foreign Affairs that the family will be able to leave the Gaza Strip within the next few days. The Bloc Québécois is asking the minister to do everything in his power to make that happen.

* * *

[English]

ROYDEN TAYLOR

Hon. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, volunteer and professional firefighters serve a vital role in ensuring our public safety.

Ninety-one per cent of fire services are provided by volunteer fire departments. Their technical training demands are growing in complexity and range. Attracting and keeping trained volunteers is difficult for small communities due to family and job demands and lost wages, as well as personal risks.

In January, Caronport's mayor and volunteer fire chief, Royden Taylor, perished fighting a fire. He was instrumental in housing, equipping and boosting the ranks of firefighters serving an area that spans 1,300 square kilometres.

We will never forget Chief Taylor's tremendous service to his community and province.

Therefore, we must work together at all levels of government to find and implement solutions for the challenges facing firefighters, both volunteer and professional alike.

* * *

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wear a green ribbon today to mark World Kidney Day. Kidney disease can hit at any age. Today and every day about 14

Canadians find out their kidneys have failed. If not treated, they may die within days or weeks.

It is imperative that we raise awareness about these vitally important organs. We need to bring attention to organ donation because kidney transplantation saves lives and it is not as expensive as dialysis. Yet there is a shortage of kidneys for donation in Canada.

We can all do our part by speaking frankly with our families about organ donation, by informing loved ones about detection and symptoms of kidney disease and, most important, by teaching ourselves about how to keep our kidneys healthy.

* * *

● (1405)

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada and its members to the Hill today. Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world. Between 55,000 and 75,000 Canadians are living with this disease, and one of those is my daughter. While rarely fatal, it is a lifelong sentence and has a profound impact on families, health care systems and communities.

In the past few decades Canada has made incredible advances in the understanding and treatment of MS. However, as leading researchers retire, progress towards discovery in the field of MS is at risk. This is why the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada and the MS Scientific Research Foundation are undertaking the endMS campaign to attract and retain gifted physicians, scientists and researchers to make MS their lifelong cause. At the conclusion of this campaign, the MS Society will have increased the number of researchers and clinicians in the country, critical steps on the path to end MS.

I encourage all Canadians to stand with those who suffer from the disease and to continue to support MS research.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the plan to privatize Canada Post's services, the post office in Pointe-Saint-Charles, in my riding, will close at the end of the month.

Workers, members of the public and elected officials in southwest Montreal joined together to make Canada Post see reason and convince the crown corporation to change its mind, but Canada Post is determined to close the Pointe-Saint-Charles post office.

Recently, Canada Post posted a job ad for a public relations officer to manage the reversion or closure of postal outlets. In other words, there are going to be more closures.

Canada Post is privatizing services with the support of the Conservative government. Whose interests is this government defending? The Bloc Québécois, along with the public, elected officials and workers, is asking that the Pointe-Saint-Charles post office remain open.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that this House and the other place both gave unanimous consent to making the Dalai Lama an honorary Canadian citizen, former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien last week said, “I respect the Dalai Lama very much but I don't think that naming him as an honorary citizen was anything good for Canada”.

That may be the view of the leadership of the Liberal Party, but I can assure people that it is not the view of the Conservative Party, the government and a huge majority of Canadians. The Liberal Party is more concerned about pleasing Liberal connected firms with business interests in China than meeting the wishes of Canadian people.

The interesting fact is that while this government is promoting the Canadian values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law abroad, Canadian exports to China are increasing and tourism from China to Canada is dramatically on the rise. Under the previous Liberal governments, both these figures were steadily declining.

It is clear that Mr. Chrétien and the Liberal Party do not stand for human rights, they do not stand for Canadian exports and they do not stand for decisions made in Parliament. So what do they stand for?

* * *

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to have in the House today members of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. Since 1948, the society has been providing hope to people living with MS and their families.

[Translation]

Multiple sclerosis is an often disabling episodic illness that attacks the brain and spinal cord, causing extremely unpredictable symptoms that vary from one person to another. Canada has one of the highest incidences of multiple sclerosis in the world.

[English]

In its 60 years of existence, the Multiple Sclerosis Society has funded over \$100 million in research grants to find the cause, prevention and cure for MS.

[Translation]

By virtue of this dedication, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada is continuing to make significant improvements in the quality of life of people across the country with multiple sclerosis. The society's mission is to be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis.

Statements by Members

● (1410)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after 13 long years without even a hint of greenhouse gas reductions, our government is finally taking the bull by the horns.

The turning the corner plan applies to all major industrial sectors and will result in greenhouse gas reductions of 20% by 2020 and 60% to 70% by 2050, an unprecedented accomplishment.

Oil sands operations must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 18% immediately and then by 2% annually. Effective 2012, it will be mandatory for new projects to use carbon capture and storage techniques and green technologies.

Our government is a firm believer in the polluter-pay principle and that is why we are establishing a Canadian carbon exchange.

The time for Liberal rhetoric and promises has passed. Conservative members are taking action now to ensure the sustainable development of Quebec within a green Canada.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, London area hospitals are facing a crisis that is placing the lives and health of my constituents of London—Fanshawe at risk. In emergency rooms, patients are waiting over 24 hours for a bed. Ambulances are idling outside hospitals for hours, waiting for patients to be admitted. Surgeries are being cancelled. It is a dire situation.

The federal government must step in immediately. The lives of Londoners are at stake. Government cutback after cutback has dismantled the community health supports that seniors and low income Canadians have relied on for preventative, home and long term care. Community supports, like the Women's Health Clinic in London, are essential because of the quality of care they provide and the reality of the doctor shortage. However, unfortunately, the Women's Health Clinic is another victim of government cutbacks.

When is the government going to start investing in long term care spaces, home care, preventative care and community health supports?

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL FRANCOPHONIE WEEK

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week we are celebrating francophonie week in Canada. This year's theme is, “From past to future generations, my world is la ‘francophonie’”.

Oral Questions

Unfortunately, the future does not augur well for la francophonie in Canada under the Conservative government. The government is showing very little interest in la francophonie and the official languages. In fact, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages refuses to appear before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

What is more, the Conservatives have cancelled the court challenges program, a program that produced the most significant gains in recent years for minority communities.

I am imploring the government to pay more attention to the official languages and la francophonie, so that francophones can truly celebrate this week that is so important to them.

* * *

TRAGEDY IN MORIN HEIGHTS

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the community of Morin Heights, in the heart of the Laurentians, is going through a difficult time. Three workers at Gourmet du village died yesterday after the roof collapsed under the weight of the snow.

Barbara Morrisson Elliott, Sharon Kirkpatrick and Marlyn Osiaza were unfortunately unable to escape the collapse. After long hours of searching by the many rescuers on the scene, under the direction of fire chief Charles Bernard, the tragedy came to a sad end for the friends and relatives looking on. It was clear from his voice that Mayor Michel Plante was deeply affected.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois and all members of the House of Commons, I would like to offer my sincerest condolences to the Morrisson Elliott, Kirkpatrick and Osiaza families, and to the entire community of Morin Heights. We share in the grief of this tragic loss of life.

* * *

FRENCH LANGUAGE MEDIA

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the International Day of La Francophonie just a few days away, and on behalf of my colleagues, I would like to express two wishes regarding French-language media.

First of all, regarding TV5 Québec Canada, the only channel to specialize in general interest programming that showcases the multicultural aspect of the francophonie in Canada and around the world, I would like the CRTC to acknowledge its mistake and grant it a mandatory distribution order on digital basic.

Second, I would like Canada to show some leadership by increasing both its contribution to TV5 Monde and its share of ownership in that channel. I would also like Canada to encourage other countries of the francophonie to do the same, in order to ensure that France does not gain disproportionate control over TV5 Monde.

Should these two wishes be granted, the francophonie in Canada and around the world could only benefit.

● (1415)

[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous Liberal government showed a complete lack of accountability and stewardship of Canadian taxpayer dollars. Therefore, it is refreshing that in just two years our Conservative government has delivered three straight responsible and balanced budgets, paid down the federal debt by \$37 billion and set the course toward the lowest federal tax burden in half a century.

Contrast that with the Liberal Party, which has now promised more than \$66 billion in scattered new spending priorities over the next four years, spending which will have to be financed by either raising taxes or driving the country back into deficit. Its most recent brainwave involves an ad hoc private member's bill which, according to TD Bank chief economist Don Drummond, would cost about \$2 billion a year and favour the wealthy.

The Liberal leader is about to stand up. I hope he will use his time to explain to Canadians that his newly minted catchphrase "tax shift" is really just code for another Liberal taxpayer shaft.

* * *

[Translation]

VACANCY

SAINT-LAMBERT

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely Maka Kotto, member for the electoral district of Saint-Lambert, by resignation effective today.

Pursuant to subsection 25(1)(b) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I have addressed earlier today my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for two weeks now the Prime Minister has refused to tell Canadians the truth about what he said on the tape. Instead he threatens lawsuits and his government has shut down the work of Parliament.

Why will the Prime Minister not come clean and tell Canadians what he was talking about on the tape, or will he admit that the only thing transparent about his government is that Canadians see right through it?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the past couple of weeks, both inside and outside of Parliament, the Liberal Party and its agents have been making allegations against me of a criminal nature that are absolutely false, that are despicable. We have been absolutely clear, as was Chuck Cadman during his life, about what transpired.

Today my representatives have filed a statement of claim in a court of law. I look forward to seeing the Leader of the Opposition actually let this go to trial so he can hear the whole truth and admit his own role in it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will not get off so easily. There was a tape and we were able to hear him. The question he was asked in the tape was about a \$1 million insurance policy. He answered by speaking about “financial considerations” for Mr. Cadman, “financial insecurity”, “financial losses” and “financial issues”.

Once again, the question is as follows: what “financial insecurity” was the Prime Minister talking about when he replied to a question about a \$1 million insurance policy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said and have been saying for the past two weeks, these allegations of criminal wrongdoing are utterly false.

[*English*]

I am availing myself of what any Canadian would do when he has been treated in a completely unacceptable and illegal manner, which is what the Liberal Party has done here. I have every right, as does my family, to defend our reputation. The Liberal Party will, as I said, come to regret engaging in this illegal and untruthful behaviour.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister clearly does not want to answer questions in the House about what he said on the tape. He even runs away from the media outside of the House.

Where will the Prime Minister hide for the next two weeks? Because Canadians will be asking him to explain the tape, and they have the right to know. Where will he hide?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, my answers on this have been very clear. They are all, in fact, contained in the documents filed in court today. We have yet to hear the view of the leader of the Liberal Party on all of this.

We are all going to be very curious to find out how it was that the leader of the Liberal Party and his party came up with an incomplete and edited version of a conversation three years after an event. We are all looking forward to that explanation.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are all heading back to our constituencies this weekend, with some relief, but the Prime Minister will not be able to evade Canadians the way he has evaded the House. He will not be able to threaten them with lawsuits.

They will be asking one question. The Cadman family maintains that a financial offer was made. The Prime Minister is on tape

discussing such an offer. In light of these facts, how can he maintain that an inappropriate financial offer was not—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only evading and hiding going on in Parliament are the Liberals on every confidence vote in the last two weeks.

We have been straightforward with the facts and, again, as I have said a number of times in the House of Commons, we could understand if the Liberals did not want to accept our word. They should just simply accept the word of Chuck Cadman who said no such offer was made.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we accept the word of Mrs. Cadman and her family. For two weeks, the Prime Minister has been avoiding our questions about the Cadman affair. He has launched lawsuits, gone on a trip and avoided the press.

For the next two weeks, he is going to have to face the Canadian people. Will he treat them with the same contempt?

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, if my colleague accepts Mrs. Cadman's word, then he should accept her statement that the Prime Minister has told the truth about this matter. Because the Prime Minister is telling the truth. Only one offer was made to Mr. Cadman: to rejoin our caucus, run as a Conservative candidate and be elected as a Conservative.

Mr. Gilles Dupeppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Prime Minister whether he had mentioned to the reporter during the September 2005 interview that the offer made to Chuck Cadman was to have him rejoin the caucus. He said yes. I listened to the tape of that interview again and the Prime Minister never said that.

Will the Prime Minister finally tell the truth, that he never told the reporter during the September 2005 interview that the offer made to Chuck Cadman was to convince him to rejoin the Conservative caucus?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have answered that question a number of times. The facts are simple and were repeated by Mr. Cadman himself at the time; we offered Mr. Cadman the opportunity to rejoin the Conservative caucus and take the Conservative nomination, with support for an election campaign. It is clear. Mr. Cadman even said so himself.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister understood my question very well. I know why he does not want to answer it. I will try again. I am not asking him whether he told us in this House that the offer was to rejoin the party. That is what he told us in the House three years later. I am asking him what he said three months later. I submit to him that on the tape of that interview, he never told the reporter that Chuck Cadman was asked to rejoin the caucus. The only thing he said was that Mr. Cadman was offered financial considerations.

Will he admit that he never said, in that interview, that he asked Mr. Cadman to rejoin the caucus. That is the—

• (1425)

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. Nonetheless, it is a bit odd for the leader of the Bloc to be talking to me about defeating the government two years ago. My agreement to defeat the government was with him, as leader of the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand what that has to do with my question.

He just told us that in the taped interview in 2005, three months after the fact, he neglected to say that the offer was to rejoin the caucus. Yet it would have been easy for him to say that. It was the simplest explanation, and that is what he is saying today.

Why did he not remember that at the time, three months later, when he remembers now, three years later? This is nonsense. He has an excellent memory, as he has just proven. Why did he not say that? It is because it was not true.

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—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Everyone wants to hear the hon. parliamentary secretary's answer. We must have some order so that we can hear.

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I agreed with the deputy leader of the opposition party when he said earlier this week that the basic issue was whether a member of the Canadian Parliament had been offered a financial inducement to change his vote. The answer to that question is no.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would have expected the Prime Minister to show courage, accountability and transparency when faced with my question. But he is turning into a Liberal and remaining seated instead of answering the question.

Will he admit that he never told reporters that he had made Mr. Cadman an offer to rejoin the caucus? He never said that because he never made that offer to Mr. Cadman. That is the truth. He talked about “financial considerations”. What were those “financial considerations”?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific

Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is going to hurt himself by asking his questions so forcefully.

All we are asking the Bloc and the Liberal Party is to listen to what Chuck Cadman himself said. He said that he had never received the sort of financial offer the opposition is talking about. Mr. Cadman himself said that the only offer put on the table was for him to rejoin our caucus and run as a candidate for our party so that he would be re-elected as the Conservative member for Surrey North.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Justice John Gomery not only said that the Prime Minister's Office is becoming too powerful, but he went on to say that the current system is, and I am quoting from Justice Gomery, “a danger to Canadian democracy and leaves the door wide open to the kind of political interference”.

We have certainly seen plenty of political interference lately, whether it was the chief of staff being embroiled in NAFTA-gate, or the Quebec adviser to the Prime Minister, who is under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner.

Will the Prime Minister follow Justice Gomery's advice and curb the personal power of the staff in his office? Will he finally bring in the police on NAFTA-gate?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we ran on a clear election platform in terms of reforming some accountability rules. That included many of the recommendations that Justice Gomery himself later made. Justice Gomery made recommendations after the election that this government has not accepted.

I would remind the House that we received representations from a wide range of Canadian government, political, and business leaders, urging us, for very good reasons, not to accept those recommendations; that they were not in the democratic interest. Those recommendations included advice from former NDP premiers Blakeney and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth

* * *

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised that things were going to be different, and yet even Justice Gomery has to point out the ethical shortcomings of the government.

On NAFTA-gate, his senior aide and his officials failed to live up to the ethical standards that Canadians expect from high office holders here.

Will the Prime Minister start running the government ethically? Will he either clear his chief of staff or fire him, clear the Canadian ambassador or remove him from office, or get his trade minister to straighten out his story or shuffle him?

Oral Questions

•(1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again as I said, the recommendations of Justice Gomery that we rejected were rejected by a wide range of Canadians, including former NDP premiers Allan Blakeney and Bob Rae, who specifically wrote to me saying I should not adopt those recommendations.

In terms of the issue at hand, the Clerk of the Privy Council is leading a full internal investigation. We will accept whatever recommendations come out of that, but I can say that at the moment nobody is suggesting that there is any evidence that would suggest at this point that I should force anyone to resign.

Obviously, we are going to make sure we accumulate all the evidence before making any decisions, particularly decisions that would be unfair to any individuals.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through all the Prime Minister's kind and deserved words about Mr. Cadman and his family, there is a problem.

The Prime Minister says there was no offer of a life insurance policy. However, if there was no offer then the Prime Minister is saying Mr. Cadman was lying because Mr. Cadman told his family there was an offer, or that his wife and family are lying because they said he told them there was.

No nice spin will hide it. The Prime Minister is saying they are lying.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why is he saying that the Cadmans are lying?

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, we will leave the name-calling to the Liberals.

All we have said in the House of Commons are the facts. There was in fact no offer of a million dollar life insurance policy made to Chuck Cadman. That attack is not credible. It is not believable because in fact it is not true.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are all looking to the Prime Minister to explain himself, to explain his own words, but he has chosen not to.

This is critical because if the Cadman family is right, this is about buying a vote to bring down the government. This is as serious as it gets.

I will give the Prime Minister another opportunity to explain. Two weeks ago he challenged me to say it outside this House and I did. Today I ask him, I challenge him, to explain it inside this House.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has explained it a number of times inside this House. I have explained it inside this House. We have also

explained it outside this House and Chuck Cadman has explained it outside this House.

I think Canadians are getting sick and tired of the Liberal Party members consistently coming into the House, day in and day out, ignoring their obligations to vote on behalf of their constituents, and smearing people's reputations without any evidence whatsoever. The Liberal Party will be held accountable for its behaviour in a court of law.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

The opposition parties have a majority on parliamentary committees...The government will have no choice but to listen to these newly-empowered committees.

Who said that? It was the now Prime Minister back in 2004.

It looks like the Prime Minister does not stand for accountability when his own ethics are called into question. Why is the government now stopping the justice committee from carrying out any parliamentary examination of Conservatives trying to bribe Chuck Cadman?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing of the sort is happening. The chair of the justice committee made a decision that he did not want his committee converted into a kangaroo court the way the ethics committee already was.

His ruling was exactly the same as the ruling made by the Liberal ethics committee chair on the exact same motion. I note that the Liberal vice chair of the justice committee also made the exact same decision as the Conservative chair: to not allow that motion to come to a vote.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative committee chairs have been following orders from the geniuses in the Prime Minister's Office to ignore the rules of Parliament. They have regularly been leaving meetings they are responsible for chairing so that nobody can ask the Conservatives about the Cadman affair.

My question is for the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice, not the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. Why did he decide to cancel his committee's meeting scheduled for this afternoon? Is he trying to prevent a democratic vote to study the Cadman affair and the Criminal Code?

•(1435)

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Northeast.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the last few meetings the justice committee has come under substantial conflict due to one member presenting a motion. The motion actually comes in unison with the Liberals and the separatist Bloc to undermine the work of the committee. That is the full effort of their decision to put that motion forward.

I ruled the motion out of order because it was not the mandate of the committee to deal with it. The Liberals should be ashamed of themselves for bringing the motion forward.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***AFGHANISTAN**

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government is known for its unhealthy culture of secrecy. The most recent victim was the Military Police Complaints Commission of Canada, in the transfer of Afghan detainees. The Department of Foreign Affairs refused to give the commission access to relevant documents.

If the minister really is cooperating fully, as he claims to be, then why did the chair of the commission have to launch a public inquiry to do his work?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her question. The government continues to cooperate with the commission.

[English]

I have a letter that was sent from the Department of Justice in response to the Military Police Complaints Commission. It states:

To facilitate the Commission's investigations to the fullest extent possible consistent with its mandate, I have been instructed to disclose to the Commission all Government records that it would be entitled to receive if the Commission was conducting a hearing into the complaints and had in fact issued a subpoena.

We will table it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is good because I, too, would like to talk about a letter.

How can the minister claim to be cooperating fully when a spokesperson for the commission, Stan Blythe, said that he received a letter from the government announcing that it would oppose requests for that public inquiry?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would invite the member to table that letter too.

[English]

All I can tell her is what I have said already. We are in compliance. We will continue to cooperate with the commission. We fully intend to. I know the member opposite will continue to rattle on as she always does throughout question period, but this letter is self-explanatory. It is on the table and the member can access it and see for herself.

* * *

*[Translation]***PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in committee today, Justice Gomery criticized the concentration of power in the Prime Minister's office. He stated that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for a public servant to refuse to act on a request by someone from the Prime Minister's Office.

Is this not confirmation that, in the Rosdev affair, the actions of the Prime Minister's press secretary, Dimitri Soudas, constituted political interference?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know about the involvement of Justice Gomery on it, but I think it is quite clear that there was no interference in the case in question. There was no interference in a contract. The only thing I saw come out of that was the need for the Liberal leader to apologize for the accusations he made about the gentleman.

* * *

*[Translation]***AIRBUS**

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the future public inquiry into the Mulroney-Schreiber affair, Justice Gomery believes that it is important for the government to appoint the commissioner before setting the terms of reference, as was the case with the sponsorship scandal, in order for the future commissioner to have full latitude of action.

Does the Prime Minister intend to follow Justice Gomery's recommendation and quickly appoint the commissioner so that he or she may establish as broad a mandate as necessary to carry out the task?

● (1440)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government would like the public inquiry to start soon but we are awaiting the committee's final report.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the House approved a Liberal motion calling on the government to oppose the death penalty around the world. This vote cancels and contradicts the policy of the Prime Minister, who wanted to decide on a case-by-case basis when he would seek clemency for Canadians sentenced to death in foreign countries.

Will the Prime Minister abide by the decision of the House and do what is just and right? Will he commit to defending all Canadians facing the death penalty anywhere in the world, without exception?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been very clear on this matter. There is no death penalty in Canada and there are no plans to change the laws with respect to the issue of clemency. We will deal with each case on a case by case basis.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's so-called "case by case" cherry-picking approach undermines the government's effectiveness in protecting Canadians on the international stage.

To be committed and effective in Saudi Arabia, we have to be equally committed in Montana. Will the Prime Minister admit that for Canada to be as effective as possible we must be consistent and oppose the death penalty everywhere, in every case?

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): It has already been said, Mr. Speaker, that there is no change in the government's position, but I can tell the House what is part of the government's position. It is our crime fighting agenda. I would like to welcome the Liberal Party back to that.

I would like to know this. We have a bill before Parliament that has mandatory jail terms for people who commit drug offences. I would like to know what the position of the Liberal Party is on it. Nobody has heard it. Canadians deserve to know.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to a previous question about the Military Police Complaints Commission, the Minister of National Defence assured the House of the government's cooperation on this matter.

Can he explain, then, why it is that the commission is talking about this: "Despite persistent efforts by Commission staff, responses were slow, censored, and in some cases ignored" and "the government's refusal to provide the Commission with full access to...documents"?

We cannot have a Canadian approach to the Afghan mission, on which we are going to vote later this afternoon, unless we have accountability for the government—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know it predates the time in the House of the member opposite, but I suppose some might draw the same analogy to the failure to disclose during the Gomery inquiry that was going on in the country.

What I can tell the member opposite is that it is within the mandate of the police commission to hold such a public hearing, which it is entitled to do, and what I can also tell him is the Department of Justice has pledged cooperation. It is in a letter to the commission from February 22. We will see how things unfold.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in answer to a previous question some time earlier, the Prime Minister insisted that the Cadman tape was not in its full form. "Doctored" was the word.

If there is a full version of the tape, will he undertake to present it to the House so that all Canadians can hear it?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the documents and the full version of this tape will be seen in court, as will the Liberal Party.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week we heard about hundreds of monks in Tibet who were staging peaceful protests demanding improved treatment and religious freedom. They are asking for human rights, yet we have heard that these protests have been met with force, monks have been detained, and monasteries have been surrounded by Chinese troops.

Canadians enjoy the right to demonstrate peacefully and to practise religion freely. Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs provide the House with the government's reaction to this news out of Tibet?

● (1445)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has one China policy. We have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Tibet. We have consistently urged China to respect freedom: freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of religion for all Tibetans. These latest developments in Tibet are very troubling for us and for Canadians. We urge China to respect the right of Tibetans to peaceful protest and to take steps to improve the human rights situation in Tibet.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over a year now the government has been stonewalling its own Military Police Complaints Commission investigation of the treatment of detainees in Afghanistan. Now there are concerns that the government will not give the complaints commission the resources it needs to carry out its lawful investigation.

My question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Will the MPCC get the funds it needs to pursue the public investigation? Will the minister guarantee in this House today that the MPCC will get the resources it needs?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as an agent of the government, I am sure that this particular commission, should it choose to pursue this avenue, which it appears it will, will get the cooperation with respect both to information disclosures and the funding necessary to have a full-blown hearing if this is the direction in which it intends to go.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I and others have been trying for almost two years to access documents concerning possible torture and abuse in Afghan prisons, but the government has refused, on every occasion, everyone who has asked for the information. The chair of the MPCC has made it clear the government has refused to release documents to his investigation, documents that the commission has requested over and over again.

For the Minister of Public Safety, will Correctional Service Canada hand over all relevant documents requested by the MPCC without delay? Will it do that?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is a very revealing letter from Alain Préfontaine, senior counsel, civil litigation section, in response to concerns about disclosure. It states, "Based on our experience to date, it would appear that the Government's cooperative approach is working quite well".

The letter also states quite clearly that the approach with respect to disclosure "places the Commission in the same position it would enjoy if it were to convene a public hearing into the complaints and in the same position as a superior court".

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by 2011 100% of Canada's net labour force growth will come from immigration.

While Canada is faced with a declining birth rate, an aging population and labour shortages, recent media reports indicate that the Conservative government plans to deal with these challenges by shutting the door on immigrants.

Why does the minister believe that shutting the door on immigration is the answer?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has it completely backwards. It was in fact the Liberal government that allowed the backlog of immigration applications to balloon from 50,000 to over 800,000. That is not fair to immigrants, to their families, or to the employers that want to hire them.

We want to increase the number of newcomers coming to Canada. We want to get families reunited faster. We want to get skilled workers here sooner. With the Liberals' support of our budget, we will get the job done.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in spite of the rhetoric, 75 additional immigration cases have been added to the backlog under the government's watch. Its solution? Close the doors to Canada. The government—

An hon. member: Seventy-five thousand.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Order. I cannot hear a word.

The hon. member for Brampton West has the floor. We will have some order, please.

•(1450)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Speaker, 750,000 additional immigration cases have been added to the backlog under the government's watch. Its solution? Close the doors to immigration.

The government has no long term plan or vision for immigration at this time when we desperately need one. Why is this minister cutting corners? Why does she not find a real solution? Why does she refuse to fight for the necessary funds to clear up the backlog?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that finally some Liberals actually

want to do something positive for immigrants. It was they who brought in the head tax on immigrants. We cut it. They voted against it.

Not only are we doing more for immigrants, we are doing it better. Family reunification cases are getting done 20% to 40% faster than under the previous government. Immigration is important to this country. That is why, unlike the Liberals, we are getting the job done.

* * *

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RADARSAT-2 satellite was developed to strengthen Canada's sovereignty.

At committee today, the industry minister would not answer the following question, and Canadians deserve to know: Will the government guarantee that if MDA is sold to the Americans, the RADARSAT-2 satellite technology, developed by Canadians with Canadian tax dollars, will not be used against Canada's national interest to attack Canada's sovereignty?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite knows full well that I did attend extensively before the committee today. We discussed this at some length. He knows full that there is an Investment Canada review which is under way, for which I am responsible as the minister.

I indicated clearly to committee that I will fulfill to the letter my responsibilities in law under the Investment Canada process. There are confidentiality requirements that relate to disclosures that happen in the context of that process, but I intend in every respect to protect the interests of Canadian taxpayers.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what about Canadian sovereignty?

On October 25, the industry minister said this about RADARSAT-2:

This satellite will help us...protect our Arctic sovereignty as international interest in the region increases.

The United States does not recognize Canada's claim over the Northwest Passage.

If this sale goes ahead and we have a dispute with the Americans over Arctic sovereignty, who will control RADARSAT-2? Will it be Canada or the U.S.?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend is aware that there is a proposed transaction. There is no final transaction. It depends ultimately upon first, the review under the Investment Canada Act by myself as the minister, a decision that I am required to make, the test being the net benefit to Canadians. In addition, there are other contractual provisions between the Canadian Space Agency and MDA. I intend to ensure that those obligations are fulfilled in the interest of Canadian taxpayers.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

HIV-AIDS

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, organizations for the prevention of HIV-AIDS are facing an alarming situation. On March 31, 2008, many such organizations will see an end to their funding through the AIDS Community Action Program, time-limited projects.

Can the minister reassure these organizations by telling them that funding for the time-limited projects section of the AIDS Community Action Program, which is dedicated to the prevention of HIV-AIDS, will not be reduced and will in fact be available soon?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, some spending was cut by Liberal budgets, but we can all work together to improve this situation.

[English]

I have given my commitment to these groups that we will try to make these Liberal cuts as least intrusive as possible so that the programs themselves could be saved.

* * *

[Translation]

**RIVIÈRE-ROUGE—MONT-TREMBLANT
INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have abandoned the regions of Quebec, particularly the Upper Laurentians. For several months now, representatives of the economic community in my riding have been lobbying the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Transport regarding the exorbitant customs charges that the Rivière-Rouge—Mont-Tremblant International Airport has to pay. Their efforts have been in vain.

Does the Minister of Transport, and Quebec lieutenant, realize that his government's failure to act is causing irreparable harm to the development of the tourism industry in the Laurentians?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at all our airports, we constantly monitor the charges. We can assess them at any time to ensure that they are equitable across the country. That is the case in Rigaud. In addition, we are currently reviewing the situation at every airport across the country. Everything is equitable and will remain equitable.

* * *

● (1455)

[English]

AIRBUS

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been four months to the day since the Prime Minister promised Canadians a full public inquiry into the Mulroney-Schreiber affair, and we are still waiting. It has been four long months since the Prime Minister finally yielded to pressure to examine what he himself called a very serious allegation of a former Conservative prime

minister accepting cash-stuffed envelopes; four endless months later and nothing.

The Prime Minister is still covering up for Mulroney. He is hoping an election will be called, preventing him from actually appointing a commissioner.

Will this be another broken promise like the Atlantic accord, like income trusts, like veterans' widows—

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it was the hon. member opposite hoping an election would not be called.

On the serious question that he asked, the question of a public inquiry, Professor Johnston was asked to develop terms of reference. He produced an interim report. We are awaiting the final report of the ethics committee, on which he has participated so that the final report of Professor Johnston can be based on the proceedings, the evidence that it gathered, and he can then set the terms of reference. We will be able at that point to move forward with the public inquiry that I know he eagerly awaits.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I have met recently concerning the plight of Brenda Martin, who remains in a Mexican jail awaiting the completion of her trial. I have spoken with Ms. Martin's mother. She is concerned, I am concerned, my constituents are concerned, as are many other Canadians. We want to see action and justice for Ms. Martin and that is what I believe this government is doing.

Can the minister give the House an update regarding the steps our Conservative government is taking on behalf of Ms. Martin to ensure a speedy completion of her legal situation and a return to the loving arms of her mother as soon as possible?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and also for his hard work on this case.

We are working to help Canadians. We are working to help her to be sure that she will be back in Canada and that she will have a process.

[Translation]

An important point— yesterday, we sent a very clear diplomatic note. We asked for additional guarantees from the Government of Mexico to ensure that Ms. Martin's rights are being respected.

*Oral Questions**[English]***FISHERIES**

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is in treaty negotiations with the United States over Pacific salmon rights. Reports that American pollock fishers accidentally caught 130,000 chinook, a full half of those fish from Canadian waters, is unacceptable. Canada's chinook catch is at an all-time low. Working families in fishing communities are struggling to make ends meet.

Does the minister intend to raise the issue of so-called accidental fishing during negotiations and will he start enforcing Canada's territorial waters and fine the American fishermen who illegally took our fish?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the member that we have already addressed the issue.

She is right. The amount of bycatch, 130,000 chinook, is unacceptable. We have made that quite clear to the Americans. There is a limit that we think is possible and practical to maintain. That is exactly what we have told them we expect them to adhere to.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, working families in Saskatchewan want to know why the agriculture minister thinks he is above the law. The minister appears to have violated the laws governing the Canadian Wheat Board.

The minister's parliamentary secretary implied that he was aware of the individual business relationship of one farmer, the head of the National Farmers Union no less, and the Wheat Board.

Will the minister confirm today that he requested specific information on individual farmers' business dealings with the Wheat Board and does he acknowledge that in doing so, he has violated the law?

● (1500)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issue that the member for Toronto—Danforth is talking about, and of course he is right up to speed on the Canadian Wheat Board, was a pilot project for organic farmers put on by the Canadian Wheat Board. I have asked for a rundown on that and how it worked out.

We know that it hoped to have several hundred organic farmers take part. It came down to 25 that actually did. I was asking for a rundown on what worked, what did not, who took part in it finally. When it had a target of several hundred farmers and only 25 took part, one has to ask what went wrong. I have not been able to get that information, so there is no illegality here at all.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Vienna Convention states that diplomats have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of another state. Therefore, not only has Michael Wilson damaged our relations with the United

States, he has violated one of the fundamental principles of diplomacy. Yet the Prime Minister refuses to remove the ambassador for leaking confidential information to the media.

With such serious allegations, why is the Prime Minister refusing to ask Ambassador Wilson, and the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Ian Brodie, to step aside? What is he hiding?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we are hiding nothing. An investigation is being conducted at present together with the PCO secretariat. This investigation will be thorough. No one has suggested that it will not be comprehensive and all-encompassing. It will be.

* * *

*[English]***ONTARIO ECONOMY**

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has a responsibility to ensure our economy continues to grow in the highly competitive global environment in which we live.

My province of Ontario is a major contributor to the national economy, but Ontario's business taxes are currently the highest in Canada. If nothing is done, Ontario's marginal effective tax rate, the overall tax rate on new business investment, will be nearly twice as high as Quebec's by 2012.

Premier McGuinty has a budget on March 25. I ask the finance minister, how can Ontario help make sure Canada remains an economic—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has asked a brilliant question.

Ontario has so much potential, but there is a golden opportunity now for Premier McGuinty in his budget on March 25. I am hopeful that he will go ahead with long term, broad-based business tax reductions, reducing the provincial corporate income tax rate, finally eliminating capital taxes in the province of Ontario and moving toward harmonizing of retail sales taxes and the GST.

I will be the first to stand up and applaud Premier McGuinty when he moves toward reducing these taxes in Ontario.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has informed me that he wishes to raise a question of privilege.

The hon. member has the floor.

*Points of Order***PRIVILEGE**

ORAL QUESTION

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday during oral question period, the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier asked the following question:

Mr. Speaker, five years ago today, the Liberal government unveiled its action plan for official languages. This plan ends in three weeks, at the end of March, and the budget did not include any money to renew it, even though the Conservative government had promised to renew it in the last throne speech. When the committee invited the minister to appear, she declined. When the committee invited her emissary, Bernard Lord, he also declined.

Considering the uncertainty her government is creating, why is the minister refusing to appear before the committee and explain her inaction? Why does she prefer to keep communities waiting?

The Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages responded:

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. I did not refuse to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. In fact, I appeared on December 6. I will be pleased to discuss the second phase of the action plan for official languages further as soon as it has been introduced by our government.

The minutes of the Standing Committee on Official Languages show that the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, whom my colleagues know well, moved the following motion:

That the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages...be immediately called upon to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages as part of its study on the Action Plan for Official Languages.

In a letter addressed to the chair of the Standing Committee on Official Language a document I would like to table in the House, the minister said?

I must respectfully decline the committee's invitation.

I must say that the minister misled the House.

• (1505)
[English]

Mr. Speaker, if you were to look at page 69 of Erskine May under points of privilege, I will read this to support my point of privilege. It states:

Each House also claims the right to punish as contempts actions which, while not breaches of any specific privilege, obstruct or impede it in the performance of its functions, or are offences against its authority or dignity, such as disobedience to its legitimate commands or libels upon itself, its Members or its officers.

I just want—

[Translation]

The Speaker: I know that the hon. member is citing reliable sources, but I want to do the same.

I have heard his arguments about the facts in this case, which by all accounts are the cause for disagreement. I refer the hon. member to Marleau and Montpetit, on page 433, where it says:

In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

In my opinion, that is the end of the matter.

[English]

We have other points of order and I will hear some more now.

The hon. member for Gatineau has a question of privilege.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to say something along the same lines.

I have here the letter from the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, in which she says that she must decline the invitation to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We were studying the official languages action plan. We invited the minister to appear, but contrary to what she said yesterday, she declined the invitation.

She misled the House. I am prepared to table the letter that proves it.

The Speaker: The committee is responsible for its own procedures. I invite the member to raise the matter before the committee. If a committee decides to invite a minister to testify, that is the committee's business, not the House's. There may be various responses in the House about a given subject, but the Speaker is not required to rule on these things. This is for the committee to deal with.

Does the member for Acadie—Bathurst have something else to say now?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, she did not mislead the committee. She misled the House of Commons. That is wrong. She misled this House.

The Speaker: I already quoted from Marleau and Montpetit on this subject. I invite the members to read it for themselves. In my opinion, that addresses this question of privilege.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

DECORUM IN THE CHAMBER

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Yesterday in the House of Commons very unparliamentary language came from the opposition side of the House. There is a decline, shall we say, in the behaviour of this House. I would implore all members of this House to bear in mind what it is we are sent here to do.

If members cannot respect the people who sent them here, I would ask them to respect the Chair of this House and the very fine officers who sit at the Table. The behaviour that is going on in here is deplorable.

Normally I would not stand to make this comment but, as many know, I will not be running again in the next election and it hurts me to realize how badly you are being treated, Mr. Speaker.

Points of Order

● (1510)

ALLEGED VIOLATION OF ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House, the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity said of me, "...the member opposite, who by the way pleaded guilty for violating the Elections Act in a recent campaign,...". That statement is completely false. In fact, the only member of this House who has pleaded guilty to a violation of the Elections Act is the Conservative member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

The fact in this matter is that my CFO did miss adding the words "authorized by CFO" in three local ads. My CFO then printed a correction in the newspaper which brought him, my CFO, in full compliance with the Elections Act.

I have never violated the Elections Act in any way. The Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity stated something as fact that was completely false. I would simply ask that he fully retract his comments and apologize.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank the member for Ajax—Pickering for the opportunity to further clarify the record in this respect.

At page 4048 of *Hansard*, dated yesterday, I did say, "...the member opposite, who by the way pleaded guilty for violating the Elections Act in a recent campaign,...".

I have in my hand, and would be delighted to table, a compliance agreement dated November 2, 2004, signed by Raymond A. Landry, Commissioner of Canada Elections, which was issued pursuant to section 521 of the Canada Elections Act, Statutes of Canada 2000, in which it states:

In this agreement, Sylvain Trépanier, official agent for candidate [the member for Ajax—Pickering] in the electoral district of Ajax-Pickering, recognizes having breached paragraph 495(1)(a) of the Canada Elections Act...contrary to section 320 of the Act.

In this agreement, he further undertakes to admit the truthfulness of the facts and take responsibility for the acts that constitute the offence. I am not sure if the member opposite is a lawyer or not, but perhaps he does not understand that the official agent is his agent and his agent means that he is acting on the member's behalf.

When he agreed that he had committed a breach under the act and, further, an offence under the act, he was pleading guilty to a violation of the Canada Elections Act. He should apologize for that offence.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, my CFO entered into a compliance agreement. It was for a local ad. He forgot to add the words "authorized by CFO". He entered into a compliance agreement.

For him to say that I violated the Elections Canada Act is a smear tactic. It is inaccurate and that member should be ashamed. I ask that he retract the comment. It is completely false and it is inflammatory.

● (1515)

The Speaker: I believe that matter is now closed.

The hon. member for Ottawa-Vanier on another point.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to return to a question of privilege raised by the member for Acadie—Bathurst and the member for Gatineau.

Yesterday, in response to my question, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages said that she had not turned down an invitation. I have here a letter dated February 25, 2008, addressed to the chair of the committee, in which she says, "I must respectfully decline the committee's invitation".

Do I have unanimous consent to table this letter in the House?

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier have unanimous consent to table the letter?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no unanimous consent.

I will now give the floor to the hon. Minister of National Defence on a point of order.

[English]

TABLING OF DOCUMENT

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In compliance with your encyclopedic knowledge of Marleau and Montpetit and Beauchesne's, I would like to table a letter that I referred to extensively during question period. I know members opposite will be delighted and are very anxious to read the letter.

* * *

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 10

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved that a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008, and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1520)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 74)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Baird
Batters	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooog	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clement
Comuzzi	Cummins
Davidson	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Manning	Mark
Mayes	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shiple
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Tweed
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Williams	Yelich— 124

NAYS

Members

André	Angus
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Barbot
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bellavance

Routine Proceedings

Bevington	Bigras
Black	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Comartin
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Dion	Duceppe
Faille	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Godin	Goodale
Gravel	Guimond
Ignatieff	Julian
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Layton
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Lussier
Malo	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
McCallum	McDonough
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Ménard (Hochelega)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mourani	Mulcair
Nadeau	Nash
Ouellet	Pacetti
Paquette	Perron
Picard	Plamondon
Priddy	Proulx
Redman	Roy
Savage	Savoie
Siksay	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	Stoffer
Thi Lac	Turner
Vincent	Wasylcia-Leis
Wilson— 87	

PAIRED

Members

Guay	Guergis
Lalonde	Pallister— 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

● (1525)

[English]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed certain bills.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC) moved:

That, in relation to its study of tasers, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security be authorized to travel to Ottawa, Ontario, on March 31, 2008, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

(Motion agreed to)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC) moved:

That, in relation to its studies on Iraqi refugee issues, temporary foreign workers and undocumented workers, and immigration consultants, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration be authorized to travel to Vancouver, B.C., Edmonton, Alberta, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan and Winnipeg, Manitoba from March 31 to April 3, 2008, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its studies on Iraqi refugee issues, temporary foreign workers and undocumented workers, and immigration consultants, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration be authorized to travel to Waterloo, Ontario, Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec from April 6 to 11, 2008, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its studies on Iraqi refugee issues, temporary foreign workers and undocumented workers, and immigration consultants, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration be authorized to travel to Quebec City, Quebec, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Halifax, Nova Scotia and St. John's, Newfoundland from April 13 to 17, 2008, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC) moved:

That, in relation to its study on veterans health care review and the veterans independence program, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to Quebec City, Quebec and Petawawa, Ontario in April 2008, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC) moved:

That, in relation to its study on Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, 12 members of the Standing Committee on National Defence be authorized to travel to Kabul and Kandahar, Afghanistan and to Brussels, Belgium in the spring-summer of 2008, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: When we were debating this motion before oral question period, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie had the floor. There are 10 minutes remaining.

The hon.member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to continue my remarks in the debate on the government motion concerning the conflict in Afghanistan. Before we went to oral question period, which was quite heated today, to say the least, I was talking about some principles related to the government motion.

First, I said that I rose today in this House to reaffirm the Bloc's position that Canada's presence in Afghanistan should end in February 2009. We believe this is absolutely essential, and we cannot support the military approach of this government, which wants to continue this mission until 2011.

I reminded members that I have had the opportunity to rise a number of times in this House, as have my Bloc Québécois colleagues. I am thinking, for example, of the vote of May 17, 2006, calling on Parliament to extend the mission in Afghanistan by two years. In the first 10 minutes of my speech I presented the four questions I asked myself, and these questions are just as relevant before we proceed to the vote.

First, is Canada's involvement justified, realistic and useful? Second, what is the exact nature of Canada's commitment? Is it military or humanitarian? Third, are the people who are going to risk their lives appropriately equipped to succeed at the mission we want to give them? And finally, is there a specific strategy for this mission?

In May 2007, there were no answers to these four questions. We did not know what sort of mission the government had in mind. What mandate did it have in mind, and what mandate did it hope to obtain from this Parliament?

Today, in light of the Manley report, for example, it must be said that the government chose the military approach. I will read a passage from the Manley report that supports the Bloc Québécois position that the mission needs to be rebalanced. The passage, from page 28 of the Manley report, reads as follows:

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

It is clear that Canada must make a significant effort to rebalance this mission. In addition, the government must make a number of commitments by February 2009. First, it must notify its NATO allies immediately that Canada does not intend to extend this mission beyond February 2009. Second, the government must immediately table a withdrawal plan to make sure an orderly withdrawal takes place by the February 2009 deadline. A withdrawal plan is required immediately to make sure that happens.

Government Orders

Third, as I already mentioned, the mission must be rebalanced by 2009. As I said earlier, it is estimated that the Canadian mission in Afghanistan cost \$7.718 million from 2001 to 2008. If we took a small portion of the money National Defence has invested in the mission and spent it on a humanitarian mission to aid development, Canada would quite likely meet its target of spending 0.7% of its GDP on development assistance by 2015. This is a promise that the Government of Canada has not yet kept. We therefore hope that Canada will reallocate some of its military spending to humanitarian projects in order to meet its international development assistance commitments.

• (1530)

Fourth, we must allow diplomacy a greater role. Diplomacy entails dialogue, discussion, talks, so that the resolution of international conflicts, such as those in Afghanistan or Iraq, is based on dialogue and discussion, and not primarily on a military approach, as proposed today by the Conservative and Liberal Parties.

Discussion and dialogue must be undertaken globally. Who with? Among others, countries such as Pakistan, which has long been a refuge for the Taliban. Pakistan is probably key to resolving the war in Afghanistan. Pashtun nationalists believe that there should be a buffer zone between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many people travel between the two countries, particularly the Pashtun nationalists who would like this border area, this buffer zone, to be established.

Therefore, discussions must take place with Pakistan. We should remember that Afghanistan has never recognized the border shared with Pakistan. As I stated, Pakistan is probably key to resolving the Afghanistan conflict. It must be resolved by dialogue, discussion, and negotiation, not by a military approach as proposed by the current government with the support of the Liberal Party. We are very disappointed, on this side of the House, with the attitude of the two major parties—that claim to be national parties—which are advocating a military approach.

In addition, there should be diplomatic discussions with Iran, which remains, among other things, a country of transit for drug traffickers. Therefore, discussions must take place with Iran, all the while remembering that for many years—between 1980 and 2001—Iran accepted many Afghan refugees, who are not necessarily Taliban. Thus, Iran and Pakistan must take part in this diplomatic discussion and solution.

As a final point, I would like to remind the House of a historic vote held on May 17, 2006. That is when we decided not to support extending the mission because the Canadian government refused to be transparent. It continues to demonstrate a flagrant lack of transparency. This Parliament must be respected and they must agree to share this information.

Another aspect of the motion has to do with prisoners and the fate of Afghan detainees. We would like to reiterate the importance of obeying international laws, the Convention against Torture, the Geneva Convention and the Canada-Afghan agreement. The President of Afghanistan, Mr. Karzai, has said in the past that his prisoners had been tortured. We all know that. So, what are we asking of this government? We are asking it to comply with the Geneva Convention, the Convention against Torture and the Canada-Afghan agreement.

In short, since I have only a few seconds left, we will vote against the government's motion, which has the support of the Liberal Party. We firmly believe that the government must take steps to withdraw our troops by February 2009 from this mission that is going nowhere, and it must place greater emphasis on international dialogue and discussion.

• (1535)

[English]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my good friend, the member for York South—Weston.

I am pleased to rise on this very important issue on the Afghanistan mission. I realize I am one of the last speakers on the motion. That being the case, most of what I have to say has probably already been stated and expressed in the debates we have heard up to now. Like the saying goes, they “save the best for last”, and that is the reason I am here.

The motion is filled with so many terms, variables and conditions that restating even just a few of them would have taken up most of the time allocated to me. Therefore, at this point I would like to discuss some of the reasons why I will be supporting the motion.

I have been a member of Parliament since 2002 and in that time I have seen crisis after crisis. It seems almost like clockwork that every few months or so some new issue comes out of the woodwork and we all act like it is the end of the world as we know it.

During my time, serving under a Liberal majority government, I remember debates surrounding the ratification of the Kyoto protocol, the Iraqi war, election financing, so on and so forth. Every time one of these issues came up, we heard blistering exaggeration from both sides of the chamber.

However, there we were, the Liberal Party taking the centrist position, the responsible position and the right position on all these issues. We were able to do this because we did not govern for ideology sake; we governed for Canadians.

Under a Liberal minority government, we continued our good work by reaching out to our political adversaries and getting things done to make the lives better for Canadians. In a minority situation, we were able to sign health care agreements with all 10 provinces that would strengthen the Canadian health care system and deliver an early childhood development and lifelong learning program for the entire country.

We made the 4Es, equalization, economy, education and environment, top priorities and we delivered for Canadians in all four categories. As for foreign policy, we were the Liberal Party that came up with the 3Ds, development, diplomacy and defence, which the present government is using and following.

We governed to get results for Canadians. We believe that a government is only as good as its actions, not its rhetoric.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

We are now the official opposition, but our leadership philosophy has not changed. We show up for work every day and we do our best for this great country and its people.

However, this Parliament is run rather strangely by this minority Conservative government. In fact, it is dysfunctional, because this minority government is often threatening and is not very cooperative. I think Canadians deserve more.

The media have reported on this dysfunction and have been playing it up in recent months. Every three hours, or even every few minutes, they claim that an election could be called.

I raise this because the debate on renewing our mission in Afghanistan has been going on for three years. I think that the Liberal Party is the only major party that participated in the debate in a realistic fashion and without locking ourselves in an ideological bubble. I would tell the other parties that our troops deserve more from them.

Our party has extensively debated this issue, privately and publicly. During our recent leadership campaign, which ended in December 2006, a number of candidates took different positions on the mission in Afghanistan. Some held the same position, but took different angles.

• (1540)

[*English*]

The fact that some of our leadership candidates had the same positions but framed it differently caused confusion. The media, under pressure to meet deadlines, did not explain the subtle differences. In the end our members, the public and the opposition parties benefited from the hard work the Liberal Party put in on this policy and debates in which we engaged on this issue.

It is because we put in the work and had a tough debate that immediately after the Liberal Party leadership race, our leader was able to outline a clear and concise position on the Afghan mission.

Do not, however, mistake clarity for simplicity. Yes, our position is very clear, yet it is one fraught with complexities since the issue at hand is so complex. We have tweaked our position, of that there is no doubt, but that is because we constantly study the issue and listen to Canadians. We have listened to Canadians and they know our position has been consistent, thoughtful and realistic.

I met people in my riding, in Ottawa and across Canada during the finance committee's prebudget consultation tour. People told me that when they listened to the Liberal leader, he was the one who made the most sense out of all the others. That is what has set us apart from the other parties. We listen, we debate and we outline our policies clearly. We know at the end of the day, we have done right by the Canadian public.

With all the debate and study in which we have engaged, the Afghan motion has become extremely detailed. We hope we have provided the government with enough direction that it will have no choice but to listen to us. I hope the Conservatives are willing and able to abide by the spirit and intention of the motion.

I will be the first to admit that some of the issues will never be brought to a unanimous consensus, but the other parties in the chamber have treated the debate in an unacceptable manner. They have played politics, advanced extreme positions and oversimplified this issue, all in the hopes of stumbling upon that ever elusive sound bite that will get them more votes.

They are aware of the fact that two sides exist on this issue, but they do not understand why the two sides exist. The Liberal Party, however, gets it. We get it because we are known for sincere debate in the spirit of openness that leads to understanding, if not consensus. When we debate, we listen and respect, because debate is equal parts, teaching and learning. Whereas the other parties wait for their leader to tell them what to think. I look across the aisle and I have never seen so many whipped MPs in one room.

In the interest of full disclosure, I want to point out that I have never been to Afghanistan, but of the people who have been there and to whom I have spoken, no two people have given me the same impression or views.

It is like when we go on vacation. As soon as we arrive in a new town, and this is common, human error, our first impression is how we determine whether that country is appealing or not. If we arrive by plane, we look at the cleanliness of the airport, and that is our first impression. If we drive into a new town and head directly downtown where there are office buildings, we get a different impression of the town than if we were to drive directly to a residential area.

Unfortunately, the extreme parties in the House, as I refer to them, have made the same mistake as so many commercial travellers have made. They made up their minds before they knew the whole story about the place about which they were talking. They have made it so easy that the question for them is simply, "Do we leave or do we stay and fight?"

It is not that easy. Nothing important ever is. The government members want to stay and fight. Do we have a choice? They have totally massacred Canada's reputation on the world scene in the last two years by refusing to live up to our international commitments or to stand up for Canadian interests. Truthfully, we do not have much of a choice but to stay, in part, because of this.

The Conservatives pulled us out of Kyoto. They have given in to the U.S. on softwood lumber. They have made Canada look more and more like a country where one man speaks for everyone. What is worse is that one man has no vision and does not share the moderate nature of the people of our country.

The other parties want to pull out of Afghanistan without as much as a goodbye. Theirs is a simple game of arithmetic. When the polls show decreased support for the war, they clamour for a pullout: really original.

Both positions are the easy way out and require no deep analysis. Afghan President Hamid Karzai, when he spoke to Parliament last year, made perhaps the best argument for Canada to stay in Afghanistan. He simply said "Canada is making a difference".

Government Orders

• (1545)

Whether the PMO vetted this part of his speech is another matter, but I believe in what he said. Afghanistan is better off today than it was before Canada decided to lend a helping hand. We must stay for the moment. We must stay because there is still work to be done. We must stay because we made a commitment to do so. We must stay because the government has made no serious effort to persuade our NATO allies to do their fair share and rotate into Kandahar.

Mostly, we must stay because if we do not all we have done will be destroyed. It is so difficult to build something good and so easy to destroy that very same thing. We have built something good in Afghanistan and we owe it to our troops, to the people of Afghanistan and to ourselves to ensure that what we have built does not fall.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's statements. One of the commitments this government has is to improve the lives of Afghan people, especially the women and children there.

As I have mentioned before in the House, last week we had the privilege of speaking to some women parliamentarians from Afghanistan. We also had the privilege to look into their eyes and to hear their stories. They were pleading with us to stay the course, to stand with them as they had the security that was necessary to continue on with the development and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

In addition, we know many organizations are doing micro-credit work in Afghanistan. MEDA, the Mennonite Economic Development Associates, has done incredible work providing women with small loans to start small businesses.

Could the member comment on the impact it would have on women and children in Afghanistan if we were to suddenly leave at this point?

• (1550)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I think anyone with a good conscience would not want to simply pick up and leave.

As I have said, some of the parties in this place want to leave and not even say goodbye. This is unconscionable to anyone who has invested any time, anyone who has spoken to anyone from Afghanistan or has dealt with the issue, even spent a few minutes reading the report from Mr. Manley.

I am relying more on the member across the way to ensure that his government sticks to its commitment and follows the motion. This is a complex motion of about five or six pages. It is very clear, though, that the military mission should consist of three items, and I will only use the main words: training, providing security and the continuation of Canada's responsibility to the Kandahar provincial reconstruction team.

We did not hear that the government was interested in doing this until a couple of weeks ago. We hope the government members are able to influence the government in maintaining its commitment in the motion. The rhetoric we heard prior to this talk was all about combat. We want to ensure that this mission is not about combat.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise today in the House on the issue of Canada's continued role in Afghanistan.

For the better of six and a half years Canada has carried a very heavy burden. Our military presence in Afghanistan has evoked emotions of pride and frustration, of honour and sadness. It is a difficult issue, a multi-faceted mission and one that I will support in the restructured form.

Since the fall of 2001, I have believed that Canada should play a significant role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and that Canada, working with our allies in NATO under the United Nations mandate, should remain in Afghanistan after February 2009. At that time, Canada's combat role should cease and concentrate on humanitarian and infrastructure projects with troops carrying out our traditional role of securing peace.

I am happy to support the motion, as amended, with the following three important tenets that have been taken from the Liberal motions.

The Government of Canada must immediately notify NATO that Canada will end its combat role in Kandahar region in February 2009. After an additional two years of training Afghan troops and police and performing reconstruction projects, Canada's military presence in Kandahar will end entirely as of July 2011.

Also, NATO must secure troops to rotate into Kandahar to allow Canadian military personnel to be deployed pursuant to the mission priorities of training and reconstruction and the government must secure medium helicopter lift and high performance, unmanned aerial vehicles to support our peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts.

The government has agreed to accept these reasonable amendments to their strategic plan for the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. This amended plan for Afghanistan is in the best interests of both the Canadian and Afghani people. There has been much rhetoric in the House and an elevated level in our media about supporting our troops. Our troops need support, yes, but they also need a clear vote of confidence and direction from the decision makers here in the House.

Support means an end to vacillation and mixed signals. We on the Liberal side of the House have been clear for over a year now. The government must notify our allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that Canada will conclude its combat role in Kandahar region next year.

The government now seems to agree that after two additional years of training the Afghan police and performing reconstruction, Canada's military presence in Kandahar region should end. Canadian troops have courageously carried out the Canada, NATO, UN mandate and have sacrificed casualties that are disproportionate to even our NATO allies.

Government Orders

We parliamentarians and our constituents have supported our troops throughout the entire mission. Now we must lend our support to a re-energized effort toward peace building, reconstruction and the protection of a just society in Afghanistan. However, our support cannot end there.

I am pleased to note that the government has also accepted the Liberal recommendation to supply our troops with helicopters capable of what is called in military jargon, medium lift capabilities. These aerial military units, which are essential to our mission in Afghanistan, are frankly long overdue. Also encouraging is the government's commitment to supply our troops with unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones.

Any time we are able to provide our military with the option of risking a piece of technology rather than a Canadian soldier, we should take and make the most of that opportunity.

As we are all aware, when we speak of supporting our troops it means more than a flag on the lapel or a speech on Remembrance Day. We must keep our troops and their best interests in our minds every day. We must be certain that our financial, technical and tactical support is equal to the heart and heroism they demonstrate each and every day.

• (1555)

By voting in favour of this amended motion on Afghanistan, members of the House are supporting our troops by making it clear that at the conclusion of our current mission in Kandahar region, Canadian Forces should return to their traditional role of securing the peace in Afghanistan while our allies provide at least 1,000 more troops with clear orders to engage the Taliban in Kandahar region.

Canada's military has kept its word, performed admirably and exceeded expectations on the international stage. During this effort our nation has sacrificed a disproportionate number of lives. In one year it will be time for the Canadian Forces to be relieved from the front lines so that they may continue bettering the basics on the Afghani home front.

In the intervening year before us, Canadian soldiers will aid the Afghan government in the disbandment of illegally armed groups that were formed pre-democracy and continue to pose a threat. When combat operations cease, Canada's continued presence in Afghanistan will remain essential if we ever hope to assist the Afghan people in attaining the type of civil society we often take for granted here at home.

If nations as fortunate as ours do not undertake some responsibility to protect those who have fallen victim to ruthless regimes such as the Taliban, then I believe we are neglecting the values that our country has stridently upheld since the end of the second world war.

I am immensely proud to be a member of the party of Lester B. Pearson. As he did, I believe Canada must be the forerunner in the pursuit and protection of peace. In Afghanistan, where running water is an everyday uncertainty, where the threat of violence accompanies all activities, President Karzai and his people have valiantly placed a dignified and compelling call for help. It is a call we must not ignore.

Separate from combat operations, our troops in Afghanistan remain at the forefront of landmine removal. This mission is designed to stop the mounting number of children who have lost limbs due to the carelessness of armies who fought before they were even born. Canadian soldiers are building and protecting schools so that young girls can study, in many cases for the very first time. Our troops and Canadian Forces personnel are fostering nascent industries and economic alternatives for farmers who are otherwise trapped in the illegal manufacture of narcotics.

In addition, Canada is working with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan as it works to create and re-establish many of the important civil institutions that were lost under the Taliban. One such initiative is the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission which investigates and monitors abuses of human rights and recommends corrective actions to the government.

Canada and the UNAMA are helping the Afghan people to develop their own capacity to protect and promote human rights. Canada must continue to work with the United Nations, NATO and the international community to help Afghanistan become a stable, democratic and self-sustaining state.

Our involvement is helping to provide the security and stability necessary to ensure a systematic reconstruction of the country. We cannot retreat just as the Afghan people finally begin to see the reconstruction of their economic, political and judicial institutions.

Canada must continue to support such peace, prosperity and security projects. These types of initiatives can continue independently from a combat mission. In reality, to be completely successful, they must.

Lester B. Pearson once stood in this place and referred to Canadian diplomacy as "history in action". He understood that the most difficult decisions were of the greatest importance. He knew that our nation would be judged not by how we thought of ourselves, as we are apt to do, but how other nations perceived our actions.

History is what becomes of decisions requiring great courage. Those decisions made by past generations of Canadians ensured that Canada is well judged by history. As Lester Pearson said when Canada was faced with another humanitarian challenge, "we must offer only our best effort and seize the day".

Our best efforts can be harnessed into the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It is a noble challenge, one that Canadian troops will meet with a unique resolve that is respected around the world. They will seize the day and the Afghani people and the world will be better for it.

• (1600)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate and will be speaking shortly on this matter. I would like to commend my colleague across the floor for his steadfast support not only for the mission but for our men and women in uniform. It has been unwavering as long as I have been a member here. Although the hon. member's support of this mission has never failed, I have watched his leader and other members of his party vacillate, where a yes or a no in many cases was a *peut-être*, a *maybe*.

Government Orders

This is from a party that originally put our country in Afghanistan, and, I might note, without a vote coming before the House of the people. However, now it has and let us take a look at the future, not the past, because darts and bullets can fly all over the place, but it is most important that we work together for the future.

I am delighted that for the extension to 2009, and this further extension to 2011, the governing party has the will and the courage, and the consent of the House, to bring this forward for a full debate. I would ask the hon. member whether he welcomes this debate and whether he feels it is fruitful.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, as I said on CPAC when we were discussing this a few weeks ago with the parties represented at the table, I welcome the debate, the House welcomes the debate and the country welcomes the debate.

The debate can be a unifying force. It can be one in which we articulate in this House the concerns that have been raised by our constituents, and far be it from me to ever shy away from that opportunity. That is why we are elected and I thank the member for the opportunity to reply in that respect.

Another thing I would like to say is that it was not as clear then as it is now, as events have unfolded. I talked about the courageous disposition of so many Afghani people, and this is what is demonstrated to our troops. They are moved by this. I said earlier on, with respect to the national solidarity movement, that great initiatives have been taken and there has been a great deal of accomplishment. This is something that should give us encouragement to go ahead and to continue to show to the world that democracy is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too listened with interest to the member's speech as it related to the combat mission and other aspects of the mission which he maintains we should strengthen, and certainly I do not think he has any disagreement on this.

For the record, in terms of security, as he pointed out, there is demining activity. The Government of Canada contributed \$8.8 million for demining activities in February 2007. In December 2007 we announced a further \$80 million for those kinds of initiatives. As it relates to governance and rule of law, we announced \$20 million for the law and order trust fund to help Afghans take control of their security situation. As it relates to community development, there is \$50 million for the national solidarity program for community development councils.

We could go on. On infrastructure, we have built 1,200 wells and 80 reservoirs so far. As it relates to women, we have contributed \$14.5 million toward girls' primary education, and so on. I could go on and talk about microfinance projects, which we have financed.

Does the member not feel that this kind of initiative is a good, solid base on which to build further development and reconstruction initiatives?

• (1605)

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the inventory of successes and initiatives that have been taken.

I have a background in development. In an earlier part of my life, I spent some time with Canadian University Service Overseas. I see what is possible when we harness the capacity for people to focus on their issues and problems and bring dignity and hope into the lives of their families and their country.

That is what is happening in Afghanistan. That is the legacy for our young people, a more peaceful future and one that deals with the kinds of issues we see in Africa and around the world. It is set by this model—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time with the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings.

It is an honour for me to speak today in favour of this motion dealing with the future of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. Allow me to repeat that. We are dealing today with a Canadian mission in Afghanistan.

As the Prime Minister said in a recent speech, the motion represents a clear and principled position on the future of the mission. It is neither a Conservative position nor a Liberal position; it is a Canadian position. I think it is exemplified by the comments that the member for York South—Weston made, that this is bipartisan; this is not simply a partisan position. It is a position that I am very proud to support.

Some say that the question of our involvement in Afghanistan is a difficult issue. I say that while the work is difficult, the decision whether we should be so involved is not a difficult one because it is clearly the right thing to do. It is a mission that displays to the world the best of what it is to be Canadian. Our men and women in uniform, our diplomats and our aid workers are making the kind of contribution in Afghanistan that only Canadians can make, contributions that reflect Canadian's shared history and values.

It is true, as the Prime Minister said in his speech that unveiled the motion we are debating today, that Canada has a long, honourable and distinguished military history. With the work that we are doing today in Afghanistan, our men and women in uniform are adding to that legacy, but it is equally important that Canadians understand the nature of our military engagement, in particular as it relates to the essential development work that is going on in Afghanistan.

To put it in its simplest terms, without security, there can be no development in Afghanistan. It requires a military presence to protect reconstruction projects, to shield the development workers and non-governmental organizations from extremist attacks, to insulate the people of Afghanistan who only want peace and prosperity from those who only want conflict and strife.

Government Orders

The development work that is going on is not what makes the evening news, but it is at the root of the progress that is being made in Afghanistan. Work like this deserves our support, and the best way to support the work is to provide the secure environment necessary for it to continue. What does that work look like? I would like to go through some of the statistics. I know that some of my hon. colleagues have mentioned those statistics, but they are worth repeating. The numbers are simply staggering.

More than six million children, one-third of them girls, are enrolled in school in 2007-08. In 2001, there were only 700,000 children, all of them boys.

I often wonder how the Taliban ever expect women to receive medical care because they prohibit male doctors from taking care of women, even in childbirth, and yet they refuse to educate women. What we would be doing by allowing that kind of regime to stay in place, or to return, would be to condemn women to substandard medical care and all the dangers associated with childbirth. Many women here in Canada now are assured through our medical system and through their care that they can have their children in safety.

Canada directly supports the establishment of 4,000 community based schools and the training of 9,000 teachers. Again, 4,000 of these teachers are women.

Our government is providing microfinance support, as one of the members mentioned earlier, to Afghan families who are starting businesses, to support their own families. More than two-thirds of those accessing this support are women.

• (1610)

When I was in Afghanistan, I saw the impact of this microfinancing and the women who are directly benefiting from these opportunities. Eighty-three per cent of Afghans now have access to basic medical care. In 2004, that number was 9%. Even that should make a New Democrat sit back and think.

What we are doing is trying to provide universal medical access for the people of Afghanistan. A New Democrat might think that medicare should be a basic right for Canadians. The right to basic health care should extend further than Canada. It should extend to the people of Afghanistan, and I am very proud to see that it is happening.

The infant mortality rate is down 22% from 2001. Forty thousand more babies survive every year in Afghanistan. The list goes on.

As I have said, I have been to Afghanistan and I have seen with my own eyes what Canadians are doing. The progress is not always fast and it is not even necessarily noticeable, but it is happening and it is happening because Canadian men and women are providing the security for progress to take place.

When I was in Afghanistan, the non-governmental organizations that do this work, the Canadian NGOs who deliver the aid, do basic reconstruction and provide medical care and the microfinancing, told me that security was absolutely essential for them to carry out the work they are doing. I asked individuals and organizations if they thought our Canadian troops should leave and if they thought that they could do their work without a military presence providing some

level of security. Not a single Canadian NGO in Afghanistan told me that we should leave.

On the contrary, they told me that the presence of military personnel allowed them to do their jobs. They said that otherwise it would be them on the next plane home and, when the Taliban came back, it would be the doctors, the nurses, the teachers and the free thinkers in Afghanistan who would be executed. Even the female legislators from Afghanistan who came to Canada asking for our help, asking for this government and Parliamentarians to continue our support, their very lives would be in jeopardy.

The work is still going on and we have a responsibility to complete that work. Finding a way to finish it, a way forward, was the aim of the independent panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan created by the Prime Minister last fall. It was given a mandate to advise Canadians and parliamentarians on options for the mission after the current mandate ends in February 2009.

The panel included eminent Canadians from across the political spectrum: former Liberal cabinet minister, the hon. John Manley; the widely respected, former public servant and diplomat, Derek Burney; a businessman and former clerk of the Privy Council, Paul Tellier; former journalist and diplomat, Pamela Wallin; and former Conservative MP for Provencher and cabinet minister, the hon. Jake Epp. I am particular proud of my predecessor as MP for my riding.

Mr. Epp played a prominent role in crafting the substantive and thoughtful report. The best way for Canadians to continue helping the people of Afghanistan is a difficult thing to determine, too often coloured by partisanship and a lack of understanding. Knowing Mr. Epp, I am confident that his even-handed and responsible approach was beneficial to the process.

I wanted to speak a bit about the military personnel in CFB Shilo, where a large number of military personnel would be rotating into Afghanistan. I was privileged to address them and their families. I told them that I had never served in the military, that I had not experienced the years of training that they have, that I had never worn the uniform or stepped into the theatre and that I had never put my life on the line to protect others and defend our values. The truth is that few Canadians have but these men and women are prepared to do that and we should give them the support in order to develop the country of Afghanistan.

• (1615)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was really interested in hearing my colleague's remarks, especially as they relate to being in uniform.

I had the privilege not too long ago of having in my office a reservist who just returned from serving in Afghanistan. He was pleased to share with me some of the success stories that he had been involved in there.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on some of the stories he may have heard from people in his riding or people he has met while in Afghanistan or back here in Canada.

Government Orders

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, in the very short time I was there I did speak to a number of individuals, not only NGOs but our men and women in uniform. One thing that struck me immediately was how young many of the men and women were, and perhaps it was simply a reflection of how old I am becoming. These individuals, despite their youth, are professional soldiers. They are well trained and dedicated to what needs to be done. There was never a question in their mind that what they were doing was absolutely necessary and that it was the right thing to do.

This House needs to support this motion to tell our men and women that we support their sacrifice in Afghanistan in order to help the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to elaborate on the contradiction between the position that the New Democrats are taking in the House, which is to vote against extending the mission, and the knowledge that most of the NGOs and most of the people who are working in Afghanistan to build that country and build the security forces in that country, would leave if the NATO countries were to leave.

I wonder if the member has any ideas as to how the New Democrats square these two positions.

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, I believe the only way to educate the New Democrats is actually to send them to Afghanistan. They should spend time with our men and women to see what is actually going on there. They should spend time with the NGOs and ask them if the military should leave or if the military should stop exercising its security role. They would get a resounding no for an answer.

The military needs to be there. The military provides the civil order that we expect from police, for example, in our country. There simply is no civil order without the military there. To deny the military presence there is to deny health care, is to deny the basic necessities of life in that country. The New Democrats, who claim to stand for not just Canadian human rights but universal human rights, should be ashamed of the position they are taking.

• (1620)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the confusion that the hon. member has as to who sets our foreign policy as somehow using the soldiers' enthusiasm or lack of interest or disagreement with the mission is somehow some justification one way or another in this debate.

He knows that New Democrats have gone to Afghanistan and have spoken with the troops.

When Parliament is setting the direction for our foreign policy in regard to a war, how the troops feel about that particular mission should be the guiding and only force. The reason we have Parliament and we have debates is to allow the representatives of the people of this country to discuss the issues.

Does he disagree with the merits of this very debate?

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, I recall during the Vietnam War that one of the first indications that war was not going right was the fact that the soldiers did not support the war, and that is an absolutely important aspect.

If the soldiers are not convinced of the propriety of what they are doing, then we have a problem. We need to listen to our soldiers. It is true that we need to set the policy, but if we are going to ignore what the soldiers are saying then we will never be successful.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the honour of being one of the closing speakers on this Afghan debate.

My constituency, as many people know, is the riding of Prince Edward—Hastings but, for those who are not aware, it is adjacent to CFB Trenton which is the military air transport centre for Canada.

For many years I have interacted with significant numbers of base personnel, both civilian and military, in my private life and now as a federal representative. As most members would be aware, Trenton is the site where our repatriation process takes place. As such, I and many of my constituents have experienced first-hand the unspeakable sadness of this ultimate sacrifice. However, despite this cost, our men and women remain steadfast in their support and commitment to the Afghan people.

When I have the occasion, and there have been many, I personally talk with each and every returning veteran and I ask them all the same probing questions. I ask them if we are making a difference and if we are making life better for the Afghan people? I can say, without reservation or exception, that every response has been, "Yes Daryl, we are making a difference. We're making progress in helping the Afghan people. Granted, it has been tough, difficult and challenging but we are making progress".

When I hear a few armchair critics, in particular, individuals who have never personally experienced one moment on the ground in Afghanistan, I can say that I place my counsel on the testimony and the judgment of these men and women on the ground who have experienced first-hand the challenges and sacrifice going on in Afghanistan.

There are many reasons for us to be in Afghanistan. We are there obviously at the request of the Afghan government and, as has been stated by many of my colleagues before, we are there as a key member of the 32 participating countries in NATO. We are there to bring peace and stability to that impoverished country. We are certainly not there to occupy. We are there to restore human rights, to restore women's rights, to help in education and health and to help build highways, waterways and irrigation. The list goes on endlessly. We are there to train the Afghan army and the police and to help set up a judicial and parliamentary process in government. In reality, we are there to help a primitive society, which it sadly has become, to evolve.

As Khorshied Samad, the wife of the ambassador, stated in the *Citizen*:

However, if a central issue is still to help the Afghan people, especially to uplift women and children in terms of human security and socio-economic opportunities, none of this is possible without a relatively secure and peaceful environment, backed by sustainable growth, and provided by the efforts of Canadian and other allies in the troubled areas of my war-torn nation.

Government Orders

A couple of weeks ago, I had, as did many of my colleagues, the honour of personally meeting the six women members of parliament from Afghanistan. On deliberations and discussions with them, it was an absolutely moving and inspiring experience to hear the trials, tribulations and struggles that these women faced and continue to face in their drive to provide a future for their families and country.

In the first free election, with over 10 millions votes cast, these women, among others, were elected from over 300 women candidates in a country where previously women had no rights. Now, over 25% of the elected population is composed of women.

As a father of three young women, although now not quite so young because I am now a grandfather of three and, I am proud to say, another one is on the way, I am actually horrified at the conditions that Afghanistan's vulnerable people have had to endure. There has been 30 years of war, poverty and unimaginable discrimination.

Under the Taliban, as we have heard so many times, girls were forbidden from schools, from an education, from a self-sufficient lifestyle and from independence. As a father, I cannot imagine the helplessness and worry it would be for an Afghan father knowing that if something should happen to me, my wife and family would not be protected and would not be self-sufficient.

• (1625)

Canada has helped. We have directly contributed to more than 6 million children attending school for the first time. One-third of these children are girls. They are girls who, like my daughters, not only will receive an education but then will teach their children to read and write. They will be able to pass on these skills to their children and teach them to be self-sufficient. It is the evolution of a progressive society.

Furthermore, as has been mentioned by previous speakers, Canada directly supports the establishment of 4,000 community based schools and the training of 9,000 teachers, of whom 4,000 are women.

My girls are adults now and have families. Like any other father and/or parent here, I still worry. I worry when they drive in bad weather. I worry when they do not call for a few days. I can imagine the worrying that I would do, though, if I were the father of three girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban. We can try to imagine it. It is literally almost beyond our comprehension and perception.

Forget driving, because without what we consider basic human rights, in Afghanistan my girls would be vulnerable to any criminal act without the protection of justice or the rule of law. Canada has helped by contributing directly to the women's rights fund, including more than 65 projects in areas such as human rights awareness, legal aid, public outreach and advocacy.

The work that our troops do through the three Ds, the defence, development and diplomacy programs, directly helps Afghanistan's most vulnerable population. We continue to provide security for aid and other workers. Our soldiers are providing security zones so that development can take place in the form of a bridge, a road or a hospital, so that they can work, help and reach out into the communities.

Without security, none of that is possible. Our soldiers and our aid workers would be literally defenceless and unable to do their work. I believe that members from the NDP and the Bloc are in denial. They seem to forget that development cannot be done without security. The NDP really has not offered a viable alternative other than the abandonment of Afghanistan. In Canada's proud history, we have never left a job unfinished and we certainly should not start today with the Afghanistan process.

As well, Canada has developed, in conjunction with the provincial governor and local community leaders, projects such as the Arghandab project, which employed 50 Afghans for three months. The price was \$700,000. It is one of Canada's largest infrastructure development projects to date in Afghanistan. Micro projects and major projects, they are all part of the evolution of Afghanistan.

I would also like to take the time to acknowledge that it is not only Afghanistan's most vulnerable that our troops are helping. Rather, our government is making an effort to help those who bravely stand up to the Taliban by partaking in the democratic process.

The members of the Afghan parliament perpetually put themselves in harm's way in order to serve their country and their people, as we so willingly, truthfully and emotionally heard from the Afghan parliamentarians. As I previously mentioned, for Afghanistan to attract so many women in its infancy as a nation speaks volumes about the thirst for freedom in that country.

Canada is performing a leadership role. At the request of the Afghan government, we are helping to train 300 members of parliament and 500 of their staffers in good procedure and process and the rules of good government.

Canada has led an important role in the checks and balances of the democratic process. We are helping that country's young judicial system.

I believe there is also a self-protective measure that Canada has and should have in mind. I will use a sports analogy to simply describe this measure. In the sport of hockey, one is successful when the action is in the other end. We saw the results in 9/11 when terrorists came to our continent. It is obvious that we must deal with that threat at its source, in other words, at the other end.

Last week I met personally with a local civilian in my riding who worked in Afghanistan for an engineering firm on development projects. He advised me of his many experiences, both positive and negative. Then he told me he was going back to Kandahar for several months of work. I asked him why. He said, "Because I can help. I can make a difference. It is the Canadian way".

I trust this House of the people to support this motion as we move forward. I thank all of my colleagues who are supportive of this issue and who show deeply their care and concern for the will of democracy and the extension of human rights and peace and security for all in this world.

Government Orders

●(1630)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): 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 Western Arctic, LNG Terminals; the hon. member for Gatineau, The Francophonie; the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Post-secondary Education.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great attention to my colleague's speech. I think everybody who heard it was very struck by the affectionate remarks he made in respect of his beloved daughters and his clear affection for them, and also the impression made upon him by the visit of the Afghan parliamentarians.

I remember their visit as well and I think that in this debate it has been obvious that the question of the advancement of women's rights in Afghanistan has been one of the strongest reasons why there has emerged a cross-parliamentary consensus in favour of the continuation of the mission. Of all the things we are trying to do in Afghanistan, raising up the condition of women strikes us all as a cause that we can all defend, despite our partisan differences on other issues.

The issue to which I want to ask the member to reply is whether our joint commitment to women's rights necessitates a change of emphasis as we go forward, a change of emphasis that would put more investment in women's education and women's health.

There have been criticisms of the mission, as it is currently configured, that it has an excessively military focus. We are aware that the budgetary allocations are heavily freighted on the military side and not as much on the side of investment in women's health and women's education, which both sides of the House support.

I am just wondering whether the hon. member could pursue, in other words, the budgetary or financial implications of his estimable commitment to women's rights, which we both share, and I put this question in the context of us both understanding that we cannot do development without security. I put this in the context of sustaining a military commitment in Afghanistan. But one of the questions I am left with as I listen to him and other hon. members is the question of whether we should not simply be putting more investment in the causes that he has defended so well this afternoon.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his concern. There will always be that challenging balance between enforcing the realm of safety and the building and developing of the country. What comes first? It is like the chicken or the egg.

I think we well recognize, though, that without the peace and security it is going to be very difficult to pour in extra dollars in aid. A number of our NGOs right now are ready, willing and able to help, yet they are not able to extend all of their resources into the country because there is not enough security for their support. I think it is going to be an ongoing balance. The long term goal, naturally, would be to frame that into a larger extension of dollars into development, but I think we have to get to that tipping point first before we can do that.

●(1635)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member who just spoke referred to his thoughts of his daughters and the kind of life they have here compared to what is going on in Afghanistan. One of the important statistics is that 40,000 more babies in Afghanistan live as a result of Canadian and NATO forces being there so that the building can take place to allow those lives to be saved.

My wife Linda and I became grandparents for the first time last year. We now have an 11 month old granddaughter, Lara, and a nine month old grandson, Bennett. I would argue that a child is no less loved and no less precious in Afghanistan than our children are here. How does the hon. member think the Bloc and the NDP members square these facts? They must understand we need the troops to be in Afghanistan to deliver the aid that allows infant mortality to drop. I would like to ask the member how he squares that contradiction in their two positions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There are 30 seconds left for the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe it can be squared. Quite frankly, I think the NDP and the Bloc positions are right off the wall. They either care or they do not care for humanity, public safety, and the future of people who are in a disadvantaged society. As for suggesting that women here or in another country are more or less important, we take so many things for granted here. We do not have a high mortality rate, yet in Afghanistan, because we do care, because we have made efforts, we have reduced the mortality rate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what has been recognized here during the course of the debate on this motion is the incredible honour and valour displayed by the men and women of our Canadian armed forces in the work they do in Afghanistan and the sense of purpose they give not only to that country and to the countrymen there, but to this House and to all Canadians. They truly are an exemplary group of people. I think that by the nature of the debate we are conducting, we do indeed honour them.

I come to this from a different vantage point than many. I have an opportunity to discuss the Afghanistan mission on a regular basis with soldiers who have served there. It is not that I have ever had the opportunity to travel to Afghanistan and I have not spent an incredible amount of time with the military on our nation's Canadian Forces bases. I do so from a different perspective. I speak not only directly to them when they are on leave, when they are on furlough and back home in the communities they come from in Newfoundland and Labrador, but as well I speak to their grandparents, their parents, their brothers and sisters.

Government Orders

My riding is blessed, I can tell members, in that we have a very significant number of members of the Canadian armed forces from Newfoundland and Labrador. In fact, while the province itself represents approximately 1.7% of the Canadian population, members of the Canadian armed forces from Newfoundland and Labrador constitute over 10%. So it goes without saying that I do indeed have a very direct connection and a strong understanding of not only the job they do but the nature of the character and the valour behind how they do it.

They come from Newfoundland and Labrador, and in fact they come from all over Canada, but that Newfoundland and Labrador connection has made me very, very sensitized to the importance of getting this mission right. There are some who would suggest that the proper approach to take here is simply to abandon Afghanistan, to move out completely, now, and to remove all Canadian military presence immediately.

While that may be an attractive position to some, if we think through the consequences of that, it would mean there would be no further reconstruction or redevelopment occurring at any point in time. To remove any and all Canadian military presence basically sends a signal not only to the Afghans but to the rest of our NATO partners that we are not in it as we committed to be under the NATO charter.

To leave this mission open-ended is not responsible behaviour either. That is what has been told to me. There have to be some conditions. There has to be some support put in place to mark a direction.

Also, it is not responsible to simply remove Canadian armed forces after an end date of 2009. Those who would suggest this are suggesting that there should be no Canadian aid presence in Afghanistan beyond 2009 either, because we cannot send Canadian aid workers into a hostile environment without basic protections. The best protections we can afford them are from the Canadian military.

However, there does have to be a rebalancing and this motion that is now before the House represents that rebalancing. I am very proud of the fact that the Liberal Party of Canada and its leadership have provided the essence of this revised motion. It does not call for a quick and dirty “out immediately” strategy. It does not provide for a never-ending campaign.

It provides balance to the mission. It provides a sense of continuity for those who are conducting it. That is what is being told to me by the members of the Canadian armed forces whom I proudly call constituents of Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Newfoundland and Labrador.

In our province, we do have a very strong military presence, not in our bases but in our province, because we do not have very many bases at all, but we are very proud of the contribution that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians make to the forces, and we are especially proud of what they are doing in Afghanistan.

That said, I note that this debate has been in accordance with exactly the values they are fighting for over there. The discourse has been civilized and very thoughtful. This is the thoughtfulness that I think they have brought to me as I discuss the overall mission with

them. They really do suggest to me that it is inappropriate to remove the role of the Canadian armed forces from Afghanistan right now.

● (1640)

They do suggest to me that there is a need, a requirement, for an end date to the mission. The balance that has been struck and centred around the date of 2009 is very responsible. The combat intensive mission, as currently engaged in or prioritized, must end by 2009, and that is reinforced by my constituents. We also recognize that the continued presence of Canadian Forces to provide protection for those most valuable aid projects is also extremely wise.

The rebalance that is represented within the mission is completely consistent with the advice that is being given to me by my constituents, who are very proud and active members of the Canadian armed forces. I am very proud of the leadership of the Liberal Party that brought us here.

The mission itself is too valuable to be simply brought down on partisan lines. It is also too valuable not to think through the consequences of either the extended spectrum of the argument, cut and run immediately, and without any due concern for the consequences of a complete and utter removal of Canadian armed forces in the present term.

It also balances the fact that we do need to send our men and women a message as to exactly what will be expected of them in the long term. That notion of balance is a product of the Liberal Party and the consultations that we conducted not only within our own caucus but with members of the Canadian armed forces and with the members of the Canadian public at large.

What else can be said? It is very important that we all stand firmly, shoulder-to-shoulder, with those that so proudly represent us in uniform, and give them the political direction as our military provides them with the operational direction.

It is very important to all of us that we continue to maintain a very vigilant focus on the nature of the mission and that we provide oversight so that we continue to get it right. It is also very important that we engage Canadians in a continuing dialogue as to exactly where this mission is going and a representation of its effect, of a results-based analysis.

It is very important that this House continue to analyze issues of cost. It is very important that we continue to analyze the issues of effectiveness. Most importantly, with the rebalancing of this mission that this House is prepared to consider and hopefully pass, it is very important that we continue to monitor and analyze the effect, and the value of our aid efforts, of our rebuilding and reconstruction efforts, to turn the economy of Afghanistan from a somewhat predominated by the trade of illicit products into an economy based on legitimate activities based on the development of natural resources and people power, its human resources.

That can only be done through the creation of long lasting community-based infrastructure related to transportation, sanitation, water, sewer, roads, bridges, educational infrastructure and health care infrastructure. This is really what the people of Afghanistan have been crying out for.

Government Orders

They recognize the need for protection, but they also need to recognize that in order for them to rebuild their country, its democratic institutions and its basic ability for its own citizens to eke out a legitimate living and build those democratic institutions, they do indeed need the support of the international community to focus in, in a very meaningful, thoughtful and effective way, on aid and reconstruction.

I do not believe that if we were to proceed with the previous motion put before this House, this emphasis would have been there, nor would that direction through our own federal agencies involved in international development be there either. It is now.

That is a very important issue that I think Canadians can be very proud of, that there is now a focus on the mission. It is rebalanced, it is headed in the right direction, and meets with a significant amount of support from the Canadian people.

Thinking through those two dimensions, the polar opposites as it were, is not the proper thing to do, to simply just cut and run. Canadians do not do that. We have never done that and we never will.

• (1645)

We also recognize there is a requirement for continuity but at the same time, an ending. That is what has been brought to the floor of this House and to the direction that we give to our senior leaders, both in government and in the military.

The operational issues will remain the prerogative of our military, but it needs the policy stance of this House and the direction given to this government to say exactly what is the Canadian intention in Afghanistan.

I think that is more clearly articulated now than it ever has been. I think that members opposite, members throughout this entire House, will agree that when we send our men and women in harm's way, when we send our aid workers out to do very difficult tasks, it is absolutely essential that they do it from the point of view of a framework that is well understood by all, not only by Canadians here in Canada but the international community as well.

We have done that. We have shown great leadership. As the ministers of the government now head to NATO to conferences in Europe in the coming months, looking to establish further partnerships, further commitments of military presence in Afghanistan, I am hoping that this debate and the passage of this particular motion will assist in those efforts to really reinforce to the international community, to our NATO allies and partners, the spirit of rotation must be respected, the spirit of all pulling their full weight and share must be adhered to. It is the basic tenet and philosophy of the NATO partnership. I think right now we have given the tools to our government, upon passage of this, to enable this to happen.

I am particularly proud of the men and women who served from my riding of Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte. While I could stand here and pay tribute to so many, and I would like to, I can only think of the time that I spent with the Bungy-boys of La Scie.

The Bungy-boys are two brothers. One served five rotations in Afghanistan; his younger brother served three. They saw what was going on there. One of them came to me and explained how

important his work was. We had a discussion about continuing the mission. We talked about its various aspects, the need for rebalancing, and how to continue on with what we are doing.

I think, quite frankly, going through the motion, the directions that have been put forward, he would be very proud of the fact that we are supporting our troops, supporting what they do, but in the process, providing a policy direction which is sensible, coherent and will be effective.

To our troops, I would like to say we are with them.

• (1650)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will make my comment brief as the clock is going.

The hon. member, for a moment, talked about the basis of his decision and I will comment on one point. There are many that I would like to debate, but the one in particular is on costs.

I am wondering if he is aware that his vote this evening, which will obviously be cast in favour of extending the mission for an indefinite time, is based without the knowledge of what this mission will actually cost.

I just want to deal with the dollars. There are all sorts of other figures and issues we can deal with, but on the cost front, I wonder if he is aware that he will cast his vote tonight without the knowledge of what the actual cost to Canadian taxpayers will be because the mission, already a minimum of \$700 million over budget, will continue in that path.

Senior federal officials within the government have been briefed on the estimates of costs because they do know these, but yet those have not been made public. Those have not been brought to the light of day.

They have not informed my hon. colleague. He talked about that issue during his discourse, about knowing the full cost and knowing what the terms and conditions of this vote will actually mean.

I would appreciate a response to this one important piece, that he will cast a vote tonight with no clear knowledge or understanding of information that once again this government has chosen to withhold from Parliament and the Canadian people on the eve of such a momentous vote as will take place this evening.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, the most important and fundamental reason we are in Afghanistan, supporting the people in the rebuilding of their country, is to provide peace and security throughout the entire world. It is to ensure that the costs of insecurity are not realized. That is in large measure what this is all about. The costs of insecurity are overwhelming to the global community.

Cost is definitely a factor. It is an issue that must be considered. It is also something that the government can provide. Clear accountability and transparency about the cost of this particular mission is a must. It is an absolute essential that the government can indeed provide.

Government Orders

However, we are talking in this particular motion about the fundamental aspects. Are we in Afghanistan for the right reasons to support the Afghani people to rebuild its economy, its democratic institutions, its ability to be a full and equal player on the international stage, and to participate in the security of the world? If so, then we have to be there for the long term.

We will continue with our colleagues in the NDP and the other parties to hold the government to account, to provide that transparency, but fundamentally, we are making our commitment to doing this right. Costing accountability is part of this, but also our accountability on the international stage for Canada to do what is right is also on the table.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that today I have listened to a member of the Liberal Party and agree with most of what he is saying. It was very well said, in fact, and I commend him for that.

My wife Linda and I have five children between the ages of 25 and 30. None of them are serving in the Canadian Forces. If they were, I would be very proud of them because I would know the work they were doing was so valuable. My wife and I are proud of them. All five of them are doing very useful work for our country. If one or more of them were providing aid in Afghanistan, I would be very proud of them. We would both be busting at the seams. It is very important work.

However, I know that if I had a choice between having one of my children serving in the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan or one of my children providing aid in Afghanistan with the military removed and the security gone, I would feel much safer and more comfortable with the child serving in the Canadian Forces providing security. If they were trying to provide aid without our forces there, it would be impossible. It would be extremely dangerous and simply would not happen.

I listened to the members of the Bloc and the NDP arguing that we do not want to be involved in combat but want to keep providing aid. That is completely unrealistic. I would like to ask the member opposite how he thinks the members of the Bloc and the NDP square their positions.

They say they care about the people of Afghanistan, but want to remove the security that allows aid to be delivered. They argue both sides. They must know that without the security there, aid simply cannot be delivered and the people of Afghanistan will slip back under Taliban control in time. That is certainly what would happen.

I would like the member to comment on that and provide an answer, if he could, as to how they square these two positions that just do not seem to make any sense.

• (1655)

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, there is a fundamental truth to that in the sense that if there was a complete removal of a military presence to provide protection, there is no doubt about it, as we have heard from the president of Afghanistan and others, the country would collapse and there would be anarchy. That cannot be allowed to happen.

At the same time, this motion is very clear. Consistent with the principles of rotation within the NATO family and alliance, there

must be an end date. We will hold the government to account to ensure that after 2009, the mission will take on a very different tenor for Canadian Forces and personnel, both civilian and military, than what currently exists. That is important for all Canadians to know. That is the position of the Liberal Party of Canada and it is articulated within the context of this particular motion.

While we say that we will not abandon the people of Afghanistan, we will do this right. We will be there to fulfill our commitments as we promised, as we said we would. We will be sensible about this and not pander to a populist point of view in some circles that the simple, fast and immediate removal of all Canadian armed forces would somehow allow for any measure of peace and security to take hold in Afghanistan. It would not, but there must be closure to this and that is exactly what is contained within the context of this motion.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte and I deal with a lot of similar people being in neighbouring regions. My riding has 9 Wing Gander and many people from his riding serve that Canadian Forces base proudly.

One of the great contributions from Newfoundland and Labrador to our country and to the world is the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, an organization of great history and an organization which predates Confederation. This regiment dates back to 1812 in its origins and serves so proudly to this day in the mission in Afghanistan.

Could the member comment once again about how Newfoundland and Labrador contributes way above the average in terms of support for troops and resources on a per capita basis? Our population base is 500,000 people. Could he talk about the sense of pride that soldiers have when they return from this mission and other missions around the world?

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is quite right. The tradition of military service and performance is deeply ingrained and entrenched in the psyche of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I will not get into the specifics because we all know them well. At the battle of Beaumont-Hamel, Newfoundland and Labrador truly became an entity onto itself, a nation.

Since then, we have been bestowed a huge legacy, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. We have members of the Canadian armed forces in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, both active and reserve, who have served in Afghanistan and continue to serve there. Members of my own constituency, members of the reserve, are currently active in the field.

As the hon. member mentioned, the contribution that has been given by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, not only historically but current day, is significant. While Newfoundland and Labrador represents approximately 1.7% of the Canadian population, well over 10% of the Canadian armed forces are proud Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and proud Canadians.

I remember having a conversation with the—

• (1700)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and pleased to speak to the debate this afternoon. It is an opportunity to practice democracy, and many members in this House have talked about that during this debate. It is an opportunity to talk about the kind of democracy we want in this country.

After all this time, I am truly concerned about the tone and the words used by my colleague, but particularly by the government. It is high time the opposition state its concerns and ask questions about this mission.

[English]

First, I will be sharing my time with the member for Simcoe North.

It is important to establish and to appreciate the work that our men and women do in our armed services. Because members of my family served in the military, I believe that for many years there was a certain neglect that went on in our country, a certain taking for granted of those who did join the forces. I saw the living conditions. I saw how underpaid and undervalued many of our service people were. If there is any silver lining in this debate, it is that there is greater attention being paid to those who choose to go out on our behalf to represent our country and to fight and die under our flag.

We hold them to the highest standard. We offer them our greatest respect. Within this very debate, the respect that we show our military men and women is to challenge the government, to present our opinions and to present debate when we are in the House of Commons. We represent the people of our country. They sent us here to apply our intelligence and our vigour to each and every debate that is before us, to ensure our country, which we cherish, is headed down the right path.

The analogy of two paths before us is a correct one. When I look at the amendment the New Democrats have put before the House and I hear the misconstruction in a way that is twisted by those particularly in the Conservative and Liberal parties today, I am saddened by this.

When members consistently use jingoistic language, when they beat their chests and distort a debate, it does a disservice to this place, it does a disservice to our democracy and I believe fundamentally it does disservice to our men and women who are fighting on our behalf. We must allow the truth to be presented and allow that truth to be debated.

I will read the first portion of the amendment so those who are listening to the debate can have it in clarity and not listen to the short-handed media clips that some of my colleagues have used. It states:

That the House call upon the government to begin preparations for the safe withdrawal of Canadian soldiers from the combat mission in Afghanistan with no further extensions;

We believe this is a responsible action. We believe this is something that can be respected and be honoured in other places, in other democracies that are also fighting in Afghanistan.

I can recall the two paths chosen. This is an important recollection for Canadians, who many of which do not get to hear these debates. The first night we had a vote in the House for the first extension of the Afghanistan mission many of the same arguments were presented, that things were getting better, that they would improve, that we must continue and not pull back. I can recall that night because I had listened to the 12 hours of debate that had gone on in this place. I had watched members one after another rise in their place and present their views.

I respect those who present their views forthrightly, whether in support of the mission or against and use evidence and their intelligence to back up that position.

However, late in the evening that night we gathered ourselves for the vote, to stand in our places on behalf of the voters who sent us here. I remember talking to some of my Conservative colleagues because of us had all been doing the count. We had listened to the speeches. We watched members rise to declare their positions with some assertiveness. It seemed confirmed to us, not just those of us in the New Democratic Party but also some of my colleagues in the Conservative Party, that the vote was about to fail, that the extension of the mission would not happen.

I was in conversation with many in that party as to what would come next. They would have to make some plans. The higher ups and mucky-mucks in the PMO and all the rest would have to do something about the vote, which was about to fail.

Then I was given pause. I looked across the aisle at my Liberal colleagues on the opposition benches. I was filled with a moment of uncertainty. I was filled with a moment of fear. As I looked through the benches, there were not one or two members missing, as can happen, someone is sick, someone is away, something happens and they are unable to get here, a dozen were members missing. The member for LaSalle—Émard who had been here that afternoon debating this very motion—

• (1705)

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Albeit I am no expert on the House functions and the rules and procedures, but I do know that pointing out the absences of many members is highly illegal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Illegal is a strong word, but nonetheless, generally it is understood by members that we do not point out the presence or the absence of members in the House.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, we can only point out the absence of people in the House at the present time. We may point out past absences, if I remember correctly.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Conservatives. I believe we are correct that pointing out the absence of members in past votes is absolutely a correct thing to do. The record shows it, regardless of whether this is in my speech, or I point out that Liberal members were absent that night.

Government Orders

When the vote passed by a slim number of votes, I walked from this place, as did we all that night. I can remember the evening well. It was raining. I looked back upon Parliament, this great building we have constructed to represent our democracy, and wondered whether justice had been done. Had justice been done for our troops, for our men and women serving in the military? Had a true vote been cast?

Members who choose not to be in their places, or to abstain, or to make themselves suddenly absent, who catch the parliamentary cold as they call it cynically, do a disservice to this place. It does a disservice to the efforts of our troops because they rely upon us to have the debate here.

They did not put themselves forward as elected members of Parliament. They did not run for office. They chose to join the military and, in doing so, represent our country in military action. Our job is to be here. It is to show up, do our homework, defend our positions and to stand with the courage of our convictions, be they for the mission or be they against.

This is important because there has been talk of some wonderful bipartisan harmony going on. While it may be true that the Liberals and Conservatives have chosen to join together on the extension of this mission, to suggest that there are no politics in a vote that is put forward at the end of a barrel of a confidence motion is absolutely ludicrous. In vote after vote we have seen from the so-called official opposition abstentions, absences and an unwillingness to vote, some this very afternoon on a motion of confidence.

It is important because it has been suggested that Canadians who have some concerns with this mission are somehow unpatriotic or unresponsive. Our top general said this was not true. This talk needs to stop in this place. We can be both supportive of the troops and not support this mission because we believe it is wrong for our country.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

This is what the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth wrote to *Éché à la guerre* in Quebec: “We want to reiterate our support for your call for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan, particularly in the context of the global day of action to be held on March 15.”

[*English*]

We must provide clarity to the Canadian people as to what our intentions are and what supports our intentions. The New Democrats will not support an extension of this mission. We believe it to be wrong for our country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before we go to questions and comments, in reference to the point of order raised by the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Marleau and Montpetit, chapter 13, page 522, paragraph 3, says:

It is unacceptable to allude to the presence or absence of a Member or Minister in the Chamber. The Speaker has traditionally discouraged Members from signalling the absence of another Member from the House because “there are many places that Members have to be in order to carry out all of the obligations that go with their office.”

Therefore, I thank the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville. It is true that this only refers to the current absence, not to the general absence.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Don Valley East.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague opposite.

I have a huge community centre in my riding. I have the Afghan Women's Association. I have met with the Afghan parliamentarians and I have been interacting a lot with the Afghan population here in Canada. The overwhelming majority want Canada's help and have said that we should not be withdrawing. The conflict has been going on for 20 to 30 years. They have only had six and a half years to find some peace and they need help. These are the women who come to us.

They have been talking about how important a role Canada plays. It is lopsided at the moment in terms of the military dollars we are giving but they want the development dollars to stay because if there is no economic enhancement, there will be no improvement and the Taliban will take over. It is not the Afghan Taliban alone. It is also the foreign Taliban. It is important for Canada to help ensure diplomacy and that the northern alliance, which is underground at the moment, does not attack anybody.

People understand that there are the caucuses, the Uzbekistans, the Tajikistan, the Kyrgyzstans, et cetera, where there is a lot of potential for diplomacy. How can we run away from this mission when the women and children are truly appealing to us to stay? I would appreciate the member's input on that.

• (1715)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, when the member is speaking, as many people have, about the purported reasons for being there and continuing to be there, it is important for us to look at the path and general direction of what is happening in Afghanistan.

I wonder if it is the member's contention that things are improving when we have report after report out of NATO describing that the opium production has grown greater and that the violence within Afghanistan has continued to grow. The question then fundamentally becomes whether the mission in which we are engaged goes in the right direction. Is it the right mission not only for Canada and Canada's position, but is it the right mission for the Afghans who she is talking about and the Afghani Canadians who hold concerns?

The current ratio is 10:1 of military dollars to spending in aid programs. Of that \$1 being spent in aid, the accountability and transparency has been almost nil. We cannot even track the dollars that are supposedly going toward building the schools and helping the people she is talking about.

We must understand that the counter-insurgency mission as constructed will only continue down this path with the vote that she will cast tonight and that the General Petraeus model, which was used in Iraq, will be applied in greater stead in Afghanistan. Canadian soldiers will be going beyond the wire more often. There will be more risks taken. This is absolutely the Petraeus model that we know and have seen in effect and will be handed over as the marines come in with another 7,000 or 8,000 troops.

Government Orders

Some have the notion that if we simply add a few more helicopters, 1,000 more troops and the Patraeus model, things will improve, but all evidence is to the contrary. The contestation from the NDP is that the counter-insurgency mission, as constructed and designed by the government and her government previously, is the wrong mission both for Canada and for the success that she hopes for, for the Afghani people, and must be ended.

* * *

ROYAL ASSENT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

March 13, 2008

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Hon. Morris Fish, Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada, in his capacity as Deputy of the Governor General, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the schedule to this letter on the 13th day of March, 2008 at 4:29 p.m.

Yours truly,

Sheila-Marie Cook,

Secretary to the Governor General and Herald Chancellor

The schedule indicates the bills assented to were Bill C-9, An Act to implement the Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and Nationals of Other States (ICSID Convention)—Chapter 8; Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Museums Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts—Chapter 9; Bill C-48, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2008—Chapter 10; and Bill C-49, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2009—Chapter 11.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1720)

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to stand in the House today in support of our government's motion on the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. This motion is not a Conservative position nor a Liberal position. It is a motion that represents the values and goals of a vast majority of thoughtful Canadians.

This is an important question, one that beckons us as parliamentarians to understand and express the very essence of our national purpose and identity, to recognize the commitment and courage of those who have fought to uphold our ideals and values and to commit, or not, our Canadian Forces, humanitarian workers and diplomats to responsibilities that will put them in harm's way. I

can think of few other questions this House might consider that carry as heavy a burden. We must wear that responsibility proudly and thoughtfully.

One of the backdrops for this debate that has arisen on a regular basis is the notion, the myth really, that we are historically a nation solely of peacekeepers. Members speaking against this mission are inclined to use this argument in suggesting that Canada's current mission in Afghanistan is a departure from that supposed pattern and they are generally eager to extricate us from any combat role so that we can supposedly resume our traditional missions involving only peacekeeping.

One can see the reasons for this. Many in Canada value our peacekeeping heritage, as do I and my colleagues. It is appealing and perhaps more comforting for us to consider ourselves as peacekeepers. It allows us to be more easily differentiating ourselves from other countries in the world. Peacekeeping seems to be more noble and right and keeps us from taking sides, to be the respectful and peaceable country that we are.

We might take comfort in the fact that Canadian peacekeeping missions were less violent and that no shots were fired. However, that was little consolation to the peacekeeping soldiers who were not always able to avoid combat, the soldiers who had to withdraw and stand by while innocent civilians bore the brunt of the conflict.

There is simply no question that the nature of peacekeeping is changing. In 1991, Canadian Forces represented about 10% of UN peacekeeping personnel. By 2007, we had less than 1% committed to this type of mission.

I contend that the excesses of this myth, this misconception, is a disservice to the debate on the role of our military, be it for the future of our mission in Afghanistan or for any other missions we might undertake. It confuses the issue because Canada's contribution to collective security since the second world war, indeed, since the turn of the 20th century with the Boer War, has not been neutral. Canada has always taken a stand in favour of our national and strategic interests and our democratic values.

It is appropriate that members of the Liberal Party have worked to forge a consensus on the motion before us. Leaders of that party and former Liberal prime ministers knew and articulated the objects of collective security very clearly. In fact, I find it humorous when members of the fourth party quote none other than Lester Pearson in defence of their indefensible position.

Pearson understood and was a fervent supporter of collective security. He served as a private in the first world war and in the second world war as a diplomat for Canada. He worked with Prime Ministers St. Laurent and King and others who stood for a strong, assertive Canada, not relishing in the drama or tenacity of war, but for the logic and advantage of working with our allies collectively to defend against aggressors who would use violence and oppression to further their political ends in the pursuit of power.

In 1951, when he was the secretary of state for external affairs under Prime Minister St. Laurent, the hon. Lester Pearson addressed the Empire Club of Canada in Toronto and he stated:

Government Orders

We should accept without any reservation, the view that the Canadian who fires his rifle in Korea or on the Elbe is defending his home as surely as if he were firing it on his own soil.

He went on, adding and referring to considerations of how much or little Canada should contribute to collective security, saying:

...we must play our proper part, no less and no more, in the collective security action of the free world, without which we cannot hope to get through the dangerous days ahead.

● (1725)

Lester B. Pearson's words retain their relevance and wisdom to this day, but most assuredly Mr. Pearson was a humble man, because Canada did much more than was required of it. Mr. Pearson and his fellow soldiers in World War I certainly did, and our soldiers in Afghanistan are doing so today.

Prime Minister Pearson's sentiments shaped Canada's foreign policy and military posture in the years ahead. At the height of our peacekeeping missions in the 1960s and 1970s, there were upward of 1,600 to 1,700 personnel deployed for peacekeeping. Our Canadian Forces involved in peacekeeping performed admirably and helped to stave off conflict between warring states.

During that time, Canada had upward of 10,000 troops stationed in western Europe as part of our NATO commitment to the cold war. Our largest deployment of that era was in maintaining a defensive posture against the threat of Soviet expansion. The threat was real and Canada understood that. In Pearson's time, Canada still devoted more than 7% of GDP to defence.

If we are to stay with our Canadian tradition of contributing to collective security in the world, it will increasingly mean taking on more dangerous missions, and Afghanistan is no exception.

Unfortunately, an Afghanistan that is grasping for the chance to be free and stable forever does not suit everyone. There are elements there, violent Taliban extremists, for example, drug traffickers and renegade warlords, who would vastly prefer an Afghanistan that would be their own personal playground, never mind the 30 million or so ordinary Afghans who would once again be relegated to a miserable fate under their regime.

I contend that Canada's mission in Afghanistan is entirely consistent with Canada's historical role, a mission that is every bit as just, noble and meaningful as those of the nearly 100,000 Canadians, men and women, who gave their lives over the last century to protect and defend our security, indeed, the collective security of our world, shoulder to shoulder with their allies.

In the Afghanistan mission, we join with 37 other countries, 24 NATO countries among them, backed by no fewer than eight UN Security Council resolutions, at the invitation of a democratically government, in a country that is among the poorest in the world, where democratic governance and basic human rights were non-existent just a short time ago, indeed, where women and girls were denied any form of status, health care or livelihood.

Our efforts there are improving the lives of millions of Afghans who have suffered through decades of war. We are there helping them take their future into their own hands.

We can and will do this, not just to achieve the ability for Afghans to chart a new course for themselves: we will be advancing Canada's and Canadians' interests and safety in the process. Experience has shown us that when the world turns its back on the likes of the Taliban or al-Qaeda having their own way with a nation-state or people, global security, including the safety of Canadians, is put at risk. Protecting the safety of Canadians is the first and overarching responsibility our Parliament assumes.

With this motion, Canada has taken a clear position. It asserts that path with conditions for greater allied support so that we can leave Afghanistan in 2011 with the full knowledge and confidence of Afghanistan's new capacity for its own security and reconstruction.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to order made on Wednesday, March 12, it is my duty to put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of Motion No. 5 under government business.

[*English*]

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Call in the members.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 75*)

YEAS

Members

Angus
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Black
Chow
Comartin
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Dewar
Julian
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)

Atamanenko
Bevington
Charlton
Christopherson
Crowder
Davies
Godin
Layton
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse

Government Orders

Mathysen
Mulcair
Priddy
Siksay
Wasylycia-Leis— 29

McDonough
Nash
Savoie
Stoffer

Matthews
McCallum
McGuire
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)

Mayes
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Miller
Minna

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
André
Asselin
Bagnell
Baird
Barnes
Beaumier
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett
Bernier
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Boshcoff
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Byrne
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie
Casson
Chong
Coderre
Crête
Cummins
Davidson
DeBellefeuille
Demers
Devolin
Dion
Doyle
Duceppe
Easter
Epp
Faille
Finley
Flaherty
Folco
Gagnon
Gallant
Godfrey
Goodale
Gourde
Grewal
Guimond
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Ignatieff
Jean
Kadis
Karygiannis
Keeper
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lauzon
Lebel
Lee
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lunney
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Malo
Manning
Marleau

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Bachand
Bains
Barbot
Batters
Bélangier
Bellavance
Benoit
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blais
Bonsant
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brison
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Calkins
Cannis
Cardin
Carrier
Chan
Clement
Comuzzi
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner
Day
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Dhaliwal
Dosanjh
Dryden
Dykstra
Emerson
Eyking
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Freeman
Galipeau
Gaudet
Goldring
Goodyear
Gravel
Guarnieri
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jaffier
Jennings
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Laforest
Lake
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lussier
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Maloney
Mark
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)

Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Norlock
Obhrai
Ouellet
Paquette
Patry
Perron
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Redman
Reid
Ritz
Roy
Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger
Simard
Skelton
Solberg
St-Cyr
St. Amand
Stanton
Strahl
Szabo
Temelkovski
Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Wappel
Warkentin
Wilfert
Wilson
Yelich

Nadeau
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Pacetti
Paradis
Pearson
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Richardson
Rota
Savage
Scheer
Shipley
Simms
Smith
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Storseth
Sweet
Telegdi
Thi Lac
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Tonks
Turner
Valley
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Warawa
Watson
Williams
Wrzesnewskyj
Zed— 244

PAIRED

Members

Guay
Lalonde

Guergis
Pallister— 4

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[*English*]

The next question is on the main motion.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Government Orders

● (1805)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 76)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Barnes	Batters
Beaumier	Bélangier
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bennett
Benoit	Bernier
Bevilacqua	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Boshcoff	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Byrne
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chan	Chong
Clement	Coderre
Comuzzi	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cummins	Cuzner
Davidson	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dhaliwal	Dion
Dosanjh	Doyle
Dryden	Dykstra
Easter	Emerson
Epp	Eyking
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Folco
Galipeau	Gallant
Godfrey	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guarnieri	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Holland	Hubbard
Ignatieff	Jaffer
Jean	Jennings
Kadis	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Keeper	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Malhi	Maloney
Manning	Mark
Marleau	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mayes	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pacetti	Paradis
Patry	Pearson

Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Proulx	Rajotte
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Rota	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shipley
Simard	Simms
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
St. Amand	St. Denis
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Turner	Tweed
Valley	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Wappel	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Wilfert	Williams
Wrzesnewskyj	Yelich
Zed- — 197	

NAYS

Members

André	Angus
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Barbot
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bellavance
Bevington	Bigras
Black	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Comartin
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Duceppe	Faille
Freeman	Gagnon
Gaudet	Godin
Gravel	Guimond
Julian	Laforest
Laframboise	Lavallée
Layton	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lussier	Malo
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Matthews
McDonough	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Mourani
Mulcair	Nadeau
Nash	Ouellet
Paquette	Perron
Picard	Plamondon
Priddy	Roy
Savoie	Siksay
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
Stoffer	Thi Lac
Vincent	Wasylycia-Leis
Wilson- — 77	

PAIRED

Members

Guay	Guergis
Lalonde	Pallister- — 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Private Members' Business

[English]

It being 6:07 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private member's business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

COMPETITION ACT

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ) moved that Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be now read a second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to introduce Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, for second reading. While we have a Competition Act at present, there are major flaws in that Act that are in need of speedy correction. I would like to demonstrate the need for the House of Commons to take action to improve the existing Competition Act.

Every time the price of gas soars, the government invariably responds by saying the same thing: there is nothing to be done because the Competition Bureau concluded that there was no agreement among the oil companies to fix prices and so there was no problem.

Well, the Competition Bureau has never investigated the matter properly, because it does not have the power to do so. All the Competition Bureau does is produce studies of the industry explaining how it operates. And when it does a study, the Competition Bureau has virtually no power, because the purpose of the studies is to explain the general operation of the oil industry, not to discipline it. Those studies have no impact and they provide no incentive for the government to take action.

The flaws in the existing Act prevent the Competition Bureau from doing any real work. The Competition Bureau cannot initiate investigations of its own accord; they have to be done in response to a request by the minister or where there have been a number of complaints. Well, we know very well that the minister is not requesting real investigations from which tangible results could be obtained.

In addition, the Competition Bureau cannot compel disclosure of documents or protect witnesses when it does a general industry study. In that kind of situation, how can we expect that individuals who have no protection will come forward to testify? As can be seen, there are limits to what the Competition Bureau can do—and that is putting it mildly. In point of fact, its hands are tied.

We need only look at the current situation to understand that it is urgent that the Competition Act be amended. The price of petroleum products is rising steadily. The price of crude oil has risen by 230% since early 2004. The price of heating oil has gone up by more than 50% in two years. Three years ago, in April 2005, a new price record was set in Montreal: the price of regular gas broke through the one dollar ceiling. Since then, it has stayed at an even higher level. In

Quebec, the price continues to go up: the price of a litre of gas was 91.6¢ in May 2005, \$1.06 in May 2006 and \$1.10 in May 2007, and it has wavered between \$1.09 and \$1.18—and we have even seen \$1.23—since the beginning of 2008.

But that is not all. Refining margins vary remarkably. It actually costs between 3¢ and 5¢ to refine a litre of gas, depending on the type of gas used.

According to the Association québécoise des indépendants du pétrole, when the refining margin is between 4¢ and 7¢ a litre, the company is making a healthy profit. On average, from 1998 to 2002, refining margins were 7.2¢ a litre. That is a little high, but it is within the limits of what is reasonable.

In 2003, on the other hand, the average margin in Montreal was 10¢ a litre, or twice as much as a reasonable amount. In 2004, the average refining margin increased 10% to 11¢ a litre. By 2005 and 2006, it was regularly exceeding 15¢ a litre, and in May 2007, it even reached 28¢ a litre. That is four times the reasonable margin.

At the present time, the refining margin has fallen back to 9¢ a litre, which seems better. However, when the oil companies decide they want their refining profits to soar again, the Competition Bureau will still not have the tools it needs to conduct a real investigation unless the House passes Bill C-454.

It is a great concern as well that a very small number of players have virtually total control over a market as important as gasoline. Is this situation international or not? We do not know because the Competition Bureau does not have the tools it needs to answer that question.

There is no need to remind the House of how shamelessly the oil companies are taking advantage of this. They are posting record sales. In 1995, the entire Canadian oil and gas sector posted combined sales of \$25 billion. By 2004, this figure had climbed to \$84.9 billion, which amounts to an increase of 239%. Total sales soared to \$106.7 billion in 2005 and \$118.9 billion in 2006. That is a 376% increase over 1995.

● (1810)

Net profits are also skyrocketing of course. The combined net profit of the six big integrated oil companies in Canada—Imperial Oil, Shell Canada, Husky Energy, Petro-Canada, Encana and Suncor—reached \$12 billion in 2006. That is a \$5 billion or 70% increase over 2004. The 2007 data are not available yet for all these companies, but there is every reason to believe that their results will be even more astronomical. For example, Petro-Canada finished its 2007 year with a profit of \$2.73 billion or 57% more than in its 2006 financial year, which it finished with a net profit of \$1.74 billion.

The net profit of the entire oil sector rose from \$17 billion in 2003 to \$20 billion in 2004 and then \$35 billion in 2006, for an increase of 100%.

The Competition Bureau will only be useful and effective if it is able to conduct real investigations. It is illusory to think that it can take real action and come up with real results under the current legislation.

Private Members' Business

This worrisome situation—the increase in the price of gas, the upward trend in refining margins and the increase in profits—and the flaws in the current Competition Act are a constant source of discussion at the House's Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology. In fact, in the committee's 2003 report on the Competition Act, it recommended reversing the onus of proof for handling “agreements between competitors” and determining whether there is a conspiracy.

In other words, when the Competition Bureau conducts an investigation, only at the request of the minister or if there is a complaint, of course, the Bureau must prove that there was an agreement between the companies, when it should be the opposite. If we consider the economic issues that are at stake, businesses should have to prove their good faith. Businesses that want to sign agreements should also have to prove the social or economic value of the agreements.

For example, in Quebec, there is a single refinery that supplies all the companies, Petro-Canada, Ultramar, Shell, Exxon, Olco, Esso Imperial and so on. The prices are all the same. How can we talk about competition when all the oil companies are in bed together helping each other out and sharing the market? This situation is reminiscent of a cartel—a group of businesses conspiring to create a monopoly.

When Konrad von Finckenstein, the competition commissioner, appeared in front of the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology on May 5, 2003, he identified the following shortcomings in the Competition Act:

—while the bureau's mandate includes the very important role of being investigator and advocate for competition, the current legislation does not provide the bureau with the authority to conduct an industry study.

He added, and I quote:

It seems to me that it would be preferable to have a study on the overall situation carried out by an independent body that would have authority, that would be able to summon witnesses and gather information. It should also have the power to protect confidential information that someone is not necessarily going to want to share, but which would be vital in order to reach a conclusion based on the real facts.

These statements prove that the existing Competition Act does not enable the Competition Bureau to undertake a real investigation of the industrial sector. How can it gather information if it can neither force the disclosure of documents nor protect witnesses?

During the last Parliament, a review of the legislation was undertaken. The Bloc Québécois found it too weak, but nevertheless supported it and proposed amendments to improve it. The bill died on the order paper, and the Conservatives decided not to bring it back, so the Bloc Québécois introduced Bill C-454 to strengthen the Competition Act.

Bill C-454 was inspired in large part by Bill C-19, which the Liberals introduced shortly before the 2005-06 election, but it corrects that bill's shortcomings. When the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology studied the act in 2003 and 2005, it found that the act contained a number of provisions that were outdated and no longer useful. In essence, the bill seeks to adapt the Competition Act to today's economic realities. It gives the Competition Bureau the power to conduct its own

inquiries into industry. The Competition Bureau will be able to call witnesses and protect them. That last point is very important.

● (1815)

Under current legislation, if businesses decide to reach an agreement to fix prices, no evidence of that will be left behind. If we cannot call and protect witnesses, there is a very good chance we will never be able to prove anti-competitive practices.

Under the new legislation, when businesses try to reach agreements with their competitors, they must demonstrate that those agreements are in the public's best interest. Presently, these agreements among competitors are permitted, unless it can be proven that they are contrary to public interest. This is unhealthy.

The bill contains another proposal: a significant increase in the amount of fines to be paid for violations of the Competition Act, from \$10 million to \$25 million. If this legislation were passed, the Competition Bureau would be much better equipped to fight against businesses that try to use their dominant position in the market to fleece consumers and damage other economic sectors.

On the whole, Bill C-454 will allow for the creation of a comprehensive strategy to deal with the rising cost of petroleum products. For some time now, the Bloc Québécois has been pressuring the government to take action to address the rising cost of petroleum products. Fighting to defend the interests of Quebec, the Bloc Québécois would like to see the oil and gas industry disciplined. Bill C-454 is a step in that direction. It is time to correct the situation and give the Competition Bureau the powers it needs to do its job properly.

Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, is pivotal to any real investigations into the oil and gas sector. Passing this legislation would give the Competition Bureau the powers it needs to carry out its mandate.

● (1820)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make two points and ask a question.

First, I would like to ask the Bloc member if he is aware that the proposed definition of an anti-competitive act for the abusive dominance provisions to include abusive exploitation may encroach upon provincial jurisdiction?

In other jurisdictions this language has been taken to mean excessive pricing or price gouging. Determining whether a price is too high or too low requires price monitoring and regulation, which are matters of provincial jurisdiction, not federal jurisdiction.

Second, the proposal to amend the anti-cartel provision might, as it now stands, criminalize a number of common forms of business arrangements, such as supply management or joint ventures, which can be beneficial to competition.

The government will not support provisions that could criminalize business arrangements such as joint ventures or supply management, or intrude on provincial jurisdiction.

Private Members' Business

I would like to ask if the hon. member would take time to reflect on implications of his proposed legislation on the province's right to monitor and regulate prices in certain markets and the potential negative effects that the anti-cartel provisions may have on supply management before the second hour of debate?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry is somewhat mistaken. When it suits him, he says that is a provincial matter; when it does not suit him, he is prepared to meddle in provincial jurisdictions.

That is not a valid reason. Why is there a Competition Bureau in Ottawa if it is interference in provincial matters? I would like the parliamentary secretary to give me a reason.

In addition, the parliamentary secretary should not forget that the Conservatives did not wish to bring back Bill C-19, introduced by the Liberals, as they were lobbying the government on behalf of the companies.

That is my answer to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate my colleague for Montcalm for introducing this bill. My colleague is quite right. The Conservatives cannot continue to say that it is a provincial jurisdiction or that it is a federal jurisdiction, according to what suits them at the time.

Citizens are at the mercy of the refining margin, the percentage taken by oil companies. We need to get to the bottom of it.

My remarks are for my colleague. I toured Quebec. When I visited a Conservative riding in Quebec, I quickly noted, as they did, that since the Conservatives have come to power gasoline prices have hit record highs. It is about time that we have a bill like the one introduced by my colleague.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comments. This proves what I was saying earlier. It is true in every municipality. For example, the Ultramar refinery in Quebec City supplies all the independent and national-brand service stations, including Shell, Imperial Oil—all the companies. They all get their gas from the same place. How can there not be some collusion between them?

That is why I was asking the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry earlier about Ottawa's Competition Act. Is it there to help the oil companies or to discipline them so that Quebec and Canadian consumers are taken care of?

● (1825)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to take part in the second reading debate on Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

As members are no doubt aware Bill C-454 proposes a wide range of amendments to the Competition Act. Among its many provisions, Bill C-454 proposes to amend the Competition Act to provide

restitution for consumers harmed by deceptive marketing practices and would give the Competition Tribunal the ability to issue injunctions to stop the disposal of assets by anyone engaged in deceptive marketing. This is to ensure that there is money available for restitution.

Bill C-454 also proposes to deter companies from abusing their dominant position by giving the tribunal the ability to award administrative monetary penalties, commonly known as AMPs.

[*Translation*]

The bill proposes to further discourage deceptive marketing practices such as false advertising, by increasing penalties for the violation of these legislative provisions.

[*English*]

Furthermore, Bill C-454 proposes to decriminalize the criminal provisions dealing with price discrimination and predatory pricing. It also proposes a number of consequential amendments to the act and other statutes.

[*Translation*]

I do not intend to address specific provisions of the bill today. Some of my colleagues will handle that, I am sure.

[*English*]

It is my hope that should Bill C-454 be referred to committee, there would be a thorough and detailed analysis of its provisions.

My primary purpose in rising to speak on this issue is to express my view that any amendments to the Competition Act should not be made lightly.

More particularly, there must be careful consideration as to how the act fits into broader competition policy, specifically the “price gouging” or, to put it another way, price regulation provisions which are provincial, not federal, jurisdictions, as well as the “anti-cartel” provisions which might negatively impact supply management.

This Conservative government understands the necessity of a modern and aggressive competition policy in this global economy. That is why in July 2007 this government took the proactive step and announced the creation of the Competition Policy Review Panel. The panel's core mandate is to review two key pieces of Canadian legislation: the Competition Act and the Investment Canada Act.

The panel will review key elements of Canada's competition and investment policies to ensure that they are working effectively, allowing Canada to encourage even greater foreign investment and create more and better jobs for Canadians. The government is looking forward to receiving the report on June 30.

What I would like to do today is set out why I believe that a careful approach to amending the Competition Act is essential.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Competition stimulates innovation and enhances productivity and economic growth. I think my colleagues from all parties recognize the importance of these factors for Canada.

[English]

I would hope they would also agree that economic prosperity is closely linked to the intensity of competition that exists in a country's markets.

Canada has achieved substantial economic success through privatization, free trade and deregulation, despite outright disapproval at one time for one of these economic provisions by all opposition parties. Through a reliance on competition and market forces our economy has thrived.

This government takes the issue of our economic competitiveness very seriously. We are determined to create the kind of competitive environment that will make Canadians much more prosperous.

In saying that, we are well aware that prosperity is not created by governments. What might come as a shock to the Bloc is that a government's job is to put in place conditions that encourage entrepreneurship and innovation. It is the private sector's role to innovate, take risks and create wealth in a way that benefits our entire society.

The Competition Act is an important part of Canada's competition policy. However, it is only one part of a larger legislative policy and regulatory framework.

This framework has a crucial impact on the competitiveness of Canadian businesses and Canada's economic performance. As I mentioned earlier, that is why this government created the competition panel in order to ensure these policies are modern and internationally competitive.

This government has also acted in other ways to increase innovation, productivity and strengthen our economy.

We are committed to providing effective economic leadership for a prosperous future and to strengthen the Canadian economy through our long term economic plan, "Advantage Canada", and through our science and technology strategy.

In our recent economic statement, we built on that foundation, introducing important new measures that will help Canadian businesses compete, attract new investment to Canada, increase productivity, and create more and better jobs for Canadians.

The results are already paying off. Just last week Statistics Canada announced that Canada's unemployment rate had decreased to 5.8%, the lowest in 30 years. In Quebec the unemployment rate has decreased from 7.4% to 6.8% and 77,000 new jobs were created since January 2007.

Canada's economy is still creating better paying, full time jobs, while the U.S. economy is on the brink of recession because this Conservative government has put in place all the right economic fundamentals.

Let me now briefly describe the Competition Bureau's role and mandate, and discuss the importance of the Competition Act.

● (1830)

[Translation]

The Competition Bureau is an independent law enforcement agency. It contributes to the prosperity of Canadians by protecting and promoting market competition and allowing consumers to make informed choices.

Led by the Commissioner of Competition, the Bureau investigates anti-competitive practices and ensures compliance with the laws under its jurisdiction.

[English]

An extremely important piece of this legislative framework is the Competition Act. It touches on virtually all sectors of the Canadian economy. It promotes and maintains competition so Canadians can benefit from competitive prices, product choice and quality services.

The Competition Act is important for both consumers and businesses. The legislation contains several provisions to address false or misleading representations and deceptive marketing practices. For example, the Competition Bureau investigates misleading advertising and deceptive telemarketing targeting Canadians. It ensures that businesses provide accurate information to consumers when marketing their products and services.

False or misleading representations and deceptive marketing practices can have serious economic consequences, especially when directed toward large audiences or when they take place over a long period of time.

The Competition Act also helps businesses. A competitive marketplace promotes the efficiency and flexibility of the economy. It expands opportunities for Canadian enterprises in world markets and ensures that small and medium sized Canadian businesses have equal opportunities.

Competition is the foundation of a strong, modern and knowledge-based economy, spurring innovation, competitiveness and productivity growth. The Competition Act is one of the key pieces of framework legislation that we have in Canada. As such, it should only be amended after there has been very careful consideration of the impact of any amendment. I would particularly note two provisions in Bill C-454 that warrant careful consideration.

First, I would hope that the Bloc members would revisit the proposal to amend the definition of an "anti-competitive act" for the abuse of dominance provisions to include "abusive exploitation" of a dominant position.

In other jurisdictions this language has been taken to mean excessive pricing or price gouging. Determining whether a price is too high requires price monitoring and regulation, which are matters of provincial jurisdiction, not federal jurisdiction. Such monitoring may best be left to the hon. member's colleagues in Quebec City. This government will not support provisions that will intrude on provincial jurisdiction.

Private Members' Business

Second, the proposal to amend the anti-cartel provisions might, as it now stands, criminalize a number of common forms of business arrangements such as supply management or joint ventures that can be beneficial in the long term to competition. Again, the government will not support provisions that could criminalize business arrangements as joint ventures or supply management.

In carrying out their deliberations, I hope the Bloc members will do their best to ensure that these substantive changes are addressed. I also hope a wide range of stakeholders representing consumers, small and medium sized businesses and other interested groups will have the opportunity to make their views known.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

In closing, I hope my comments today have shown how important competition and the Competition Act are for Canadian consumers and Canadian companies, no matter what their size.

I also hope my hon. colleagues—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary, but his time has run out.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-454. I would like to congratulate the member for Montcalm on his bill.

[*English*]

The origins of the bill can be traced back to early 2002 when the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology released a report entitled, "A Plan to Modernize Canada's Competition Act". The proposed changes from that committee's report formed the basis of government Bill C-19 during the 38th Parliament, under the leadership of the member for LaSalle—Émard.

Reading this private member's bill, I noticed that virtually all the provisions of Bill C-19 have been included as well as some of the other recommendations from the industry committee's 2002 report, which did not find their way into the original bill.

I understand many of the additions in Bill C-454 had been proposed during the rather lengthy year that the industry committee spent studying Bill C-19 before it died on the order paper in November 2005.

Above and beyond those additions, Bill C-454 has a number of other amendments that were not in the original bill.

While I am willing to lend my vote to the bill at second reading, I do so in the hope that it will receive the same diligent consideration at committee stage that Bill C-19 received in 2005. We must, as legislators, ensure that the objectives of the bill will be met without any unintended consequences.

To reiterate my position for the member, the bill shows good promise and I will support it at this stage. However, I will reserve my final judgment until it returns from committee wherein stakeholders and Canadians will have had the opportunity to voice their praise or their concerns for the bill.

While I am on the topic of committee stage, I hope the industry committee's efforts to review the bill will be well coordinated with the Minister of Industry's review of the Competition Act. I believe the minister is expecting his panel to report later this spring and I hope that the two tracks will find some common ground.

The underlying purpose of Bill C-454 is to enhance the Competition Act, with a view to ensuring that businesses in our country compete with each other in a fair and open market. The act helps to protect businesses, especially small businesses, but large ones as well, from becoming the victims of such anti-competitive behaviour as predatory pricing and abuse of dominance.

The end beneficiary of this is the Canadian consumer, who will benefit from increased competition, diversified choice and in theory lower prices at the cash register. The act achieves this through the Competition Bureau, which enforces the provisions by responding to consumer complaints and investigating evidence of illegal activity by businesses.

The biggest change that Bill C-454 would make to the Competition Act is it would allow for general administrative monetary penalty, or AMP, provisions to be used against businesses or individuals abusing their dominant position in any industry. This would allow businesses and individuals injured by an abuse of dominance to seek financial remuneration for any damages they have suffered due to abuse of a dominant position. Currently there are only criminal penalties for such breaches of the act.

Similar administrative monetary penalty provisions are already in place for abuse of dominance in many countries around the world. Adding Canada to the list of countries that allows for these fines in cases where dominance has been abused is important, not only domestically but also in terms of strengthening ties with our major trading partners.

Let me move on to other aspects of Bill C-454. One is that the bill would increase the administrative penalties, or AMPs, that a business could be fined for practising in deceptive marketing practices. With the low limits of the current maximums, deceptive marketing can often lead to profits that are far greater than the monetary penalties that can be administered. By raising the limits, we will increase the deterrence factor and help to ensure that the people who are hurt by deceptive marketing campaigns can get a much greater percentage of their investment back from the guilty party.

Another measure included in the bill, which came directly from the industry committee's 2002 report, was to eliminate the section of the Competition Act that dealt specifically with airlines. This special mention of our airline industry was added at a time when Canadian and Air Canada were merging and there was widespread concern that the Competition Bureau needed stronger tools to ensure that the combined giant did not engage in predatory conduct.

Private Members' Business

•(1840)

Today, however, there are many low cost carriers that have emerged and the airline industry no longer needs special mention in the act. The industry can go back to being covered by the general provisions, which, as I have mentioned, would be strengthened the bill.

I am glad to see that the Bloc Québécois have taken an interest in helping to build a stronger 21st century economy, supported by a competitive marketplace and a competition with the tools to ensure that they get the job done. The Bloc often takes a narrow and isolationist approach to economic matters, so it is nice to see it put country before its own party interests.

It would have been very easy for the Bloc for instance to dismiss a bill, such as C-19, as an intrusion of the federal government into matters of provincial jurisdiction. For instance, price controls are the exclusive jurisdiction of the provincial government, save for in emergency situations. The Bloc of old might have believed that the federal government had no place deciding when a business had engaged in predatory pricing. Determining the appropriate price of something could be interpreted as a matter purely for provincial jurisdiction.

In this instance I am glad to see that my Bloc colleague from Montcalm was willing to table a bill that proves a federal bill can be good for all Canadians including the people of Quebec.

I look forward to seeing what the industry committee does with Bill C-454 and when it arrives back here in the House for report stage and third reading.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts and to congratulate the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois for introducing it.

The Competition Act is an important law in Canada. It governs how we do business in a number of ways. The purpose of the Competition Act is to encourage Canadian businesses to compete with one another with the belief that enhanced competition will lead to lower prices and greater product choice for consumers.

The Competition Act contains criminal and civil provisions which apply to most industries and businesses in Canada, both large and small. The Competition Bureau is an independent federal agency which administers the act.

The current act criminalizes some anti-competitive practices. The criminal provisions include: conspiracy to unduly lessen competition; bid rigging; discriminatory and predatory pricing; price maintenance; refusal to supply; and certain misleading advertising and deceptive marketing practices. The offences are investigated by the Competition Bureau and prosecuted in federal or provincial superior courts.

Attempts have been made before to update the Competition Act. In April 2002 the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology released a report entitled "A Plan to Modernize Canada's Competition Regime". It recommended extensive amendments to the Competition Act.

Subsequently Bill C-19 was introduced. It proposed changes to the Competition Act that would have allowed the Competition Tribunal to impose an AMP, an administrative monetary penalty, if it found that a person or a company abused its dominant position. It would have increased the AMP that the Competition Tribunal or court could impose when it found that a person or company had engaged in deceptive marketing. It would have repealed the airline specific provisions that are currently found in the act, which arose out of a particular period in Canada's aviation history and were designed to deal specifically with the airline industry. Bill C-19 proposed to decriminalize predatory and discriminatory pricing provisions.

At the time, there was a great deal of debate about Bill C-19 but it died on the order paper and ultimately did not pass. The Competition Act remained unchanged and that is very unfortunate for Canadians.

Every time the price of gasoline goes up, we hear complaints from our constituents. They see gas prices rise in lockstep usually just before a long weekend. The greatest instance of consumer complaints is probably from people who believe they are being gouged by gas and oil companies.

The government should deal with this in a more effective way. It is clear that the Competition Act, as it currently stands, does not have the teeth to deal with this kind of price gouging. It should be thoroughly investigated so that Canadian consumers are protected.

•(1845)

The issue of deceptive marketing and deceptive advertising is also of great concern to Canadians. We have an aging population. We all know of situations where seniors especially have fallen prey to deceptive advertising. Again, the Competition Act simply does not have the teeth to protect consumers. It is basically a buyer beware situation, and that is simply not good enough.

We should think of a situation where an individual senior, who lives alone in his or her own home, who maybe does not have access to the Internet, and does not read as widely as some other folks, is up against a very powerful and well resourced company that has a very slick marketing campaign. That individual senior could be quite vulnerable. I believe it is our job as parliamentarians to do everything we can to ensure that all consumers are protected.

We all want to foster a healthy economy. We want to make sure that we are creating the conditions for businesses in our economy to do well and for them to compete. We have a very mature economy, but there has to be a balance so that consumers are also protected.

Today the average person is really getting squeezed. Savings are at an all time low and consumer debt is the highest it has been in a generation. People are incredibly price sensitive. There are people who have to commute from the suburbs to the centre of town to go to work every day. Some people in my part of the country and the greater Toronto area commute long distances. With respect to the price of gas, people are phenomenally price sensitive. When the price of oil goes up, consumers really take a hit in the pocketbook. They need us to make sure that they are protected.

Private Members' Business

There is one concern that I do have with this bill, and it was a concern with Bill C-19 as well, which is that the AMPs, the administrative monetary penalties, would be tax deductible for the corporations that face these penalties. That does not make any sense. It makes no sense that the Government of Canada and the Canadian taxpayers would somehow be responsible for paying these monetary penalties. That is something we should discuss at the committee.

I will be supporting this bill. As a member of the industry committee, I look forward to discussing the bill at the industry committee. The goal is to protect Canadian consumers, to put teeth into the Competition Act, and to protect our seniors from deceptive advertising. I believe all of these provisions would lead to greater competition and a healthier economy.

• (1850)

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure today to speak to Bill C-454, which was introduced by the Bloc Québécois member for Montcalm. First, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent work and on this initiative to bring this important issue back to the House of Commons. It has not lost its relevance over the past few years with the price of gas at the pump now hovering around \$1.15.

Bill C-454 is being read for the first time in Parliament, but I want to remind some of my colleagues from other parties that it is inspired in large part by Bill C-19, which the Liberals tabled shortly before the 2005-06 elections, and which the Conservatives decided not to reintroduce. Of course, it has been rewritten and improved, but it is, in essence, the same. If I were to provide a broad outline of this bill, I would summarize it by saying that its purpose is to strengthen the Competition Act.

First, it gives the Competition Bureau the power to conduct its own inquiries into the oil industry. Currently, the bureau can do no more than undertake general studies that have no consequences.

In the course of conducting such inquiries, it can summon and protect witnesses. If it could not do so, it would very likely never be able to prove anti-competitive practices.

Lastly, when companies want to enter into agreements with their competitors, they will have to prove that these agreements are in the public interest. The bill also significantly raises the amount of fines, from \$10 million to \$25 million.

That said, exactly what need is this bill trying to meet?

Prices of petroleum products are rising steadily, and we want Quebecers to have a way of finding out why this is happening, who is benefiting and, most importantly, whether this is reasonable.

The first major problem that is affecting everyone to different degrees is the rising price of crude oil. This is having a direct impact on the price per barrel, which is fluctuating today between US\$100 and US\$110 and has increased by 230% since early 2004.

This in turn is affecting the price of heating oil, which is on the rise. It has averaged about 90¢ since early 2007 and has gone up by more than 50% in the past two years. I want to remind the House that according to Statistics Canada, approximately 500,000 Quebec households in Quebec still heat with oil or another liquid fuel.

The increase in the price of crude oil is also driving up the price of gas, which, understandably, has raised the public's ire for the past several years.

For a number of years, in fact, old records have fallen repeatedly as the price of regular gas has regularly reached new highs. Fluctuations aside, the price of gas in Quebec is going up steadily; it was 71.3¢ in May 2002, 94.4¢ in May 2004 and \$1.10 in May 2007. Since the beginning of the year it has fluctuated between \$1.09 and \$1.18.

At the same time, oil companies have posted record sales for a number of years. But that is not all. Oil companies' net profits have also skyrocketed in recent years. The oil industry's net profits rose from \$17.6 billion in 2003 to \$20.2 billion in 2004 and \$35 billion in 2006, a 100% increase.

What is more, with respect to the increase in costs, if we compare the price of regular gas in Quebec today with the price in 2004, we find that the retailer mark-up has remained stable, taxes have remained stable and even gone down in proportion to the price of a litre of gas, and the increase in the price of crude oil accounts in part for the increases.

But lately, the constant fluctuations in gas prices cannot be explained by crude oil prices; they are attributable to the obscene profits made by the refineries.

Is this situation intentional? We do not know, because the Competition Bureau does not have the tools it needs to conduct a serious and complete investigation. But one thing is for sure: the structure of the oil industry encourages spikes in gas prices, and is conducive to abuse. That is why the industry must be monitored, hence Bill C-454.

• (1855)

As members know, I am the Bloc's natural resources critic, and it is part of my duties to learn about the oil industry. That is precisely what the Standing Committee on Natural Resources did for several months last year, as part of an important study on the oil sands industry. Over the course of about 30 meetings, we heard from some 100 witnesses, many of whom came from the oil industry.

I listened to and questioned these witnesses carefully, and although our conclusions can be found in the committee's report, I would like to share how these testimonies touched me personally.

When I was listening to these professional lobbyists, I was deeply struck by the excesses of the industry, with its echoes of the gold rush.

People in the oil industry came to talk to us, they explained the challenges, confidently predicted the future, easily came up with rational solutions to complex problems in their heads, but were so detached from the effects caused by their industry, that it literally took my breath away.

Private Members' Business

As everyone also knows, I am a social worker by training, and if I wanted to draw a parallel with a type of clientele, I would say we are dealing with an industry that has a very hard time regarding itself objectively or engaging in any self-criticism, and above all, we are dealing with an industry for whom the end justifies the means and that is always right. It has a bit of a superiority complex, which places it above other things and makes it prone to over-ambition and exaggeration, often in a shameless manner.

In the case of the petroleum industry, the excessiveness of the financial stakes—we are still talking about billions of dollars—and the current importance of their products, which are practically essential to the functioning of society, create this cavalier attitude that often lacks any moral or ethical sensibility. I could give so many examples that I could easily keep the House busy until tomorrow, but let us look at just one, more recent and very typical example.

On Monday, March 10, the Minister of the Environment presented his solutions for climate change problems—a plan whose flabbiness will surely go down in history. One of his proposals is carbon capture and storage by the oil industry. Speaking through a task force that delivered a study to Natural Resources Canada, the oil industry responded that it refuses to invest great sums of money in this technology because of the uncertainty surrounding its large-scale commercialization.

And as if that were not enough, the task force, composed of one academic and four industry representatives, went even further. Try to listen to this without being too surprised:

...it is a very difficult proposition for individual private sector players to commit additional hundreds of millions of dollars...to achieve a public good...for which it may not be compensated with an adequate (or any) return on investment.

In any context that statement would be unacceptable, but in the current climate change crisis, it is totally irresponsible and insulting. This method would force private companies to contain their pollution.

The members of this task force act as if they are doing us a favour. They are completely disconnected from reality, so much so that they add even more. As François Cardinal reported in *La Presse* on March 11, the report recommends that the federal government allocate \$2 billion immediately and that both levels of government provide “stable financial incentives”.

I would like to remind hon. members that the oil industry made \$35 billion in profits in 2006. And these people are talking about the impossibility of investing in the public good unless profit is involved?

I also want to point out that in addition to \$66 billion in direct subsidies from the federal government between 1970 and 1999, this industry is currently benefiting, through accelerated capital cost allowance, from tax measures such as former Bill C-48, under the Liberals in 2003, and from tax cuts announced by the Conservatives in the economic statement of November 2007 of up to \$1.5 billion annually.

In the coming year alone, the oil industry will receive a \$1.18 billion gift. In total, for the 2008-13 period, roughly \$7.8 billion will go into the pockets of the oil companies through

various measures implemented by both the Conservatives and the Liberals.

Yesterday I received a phone call from a constituent from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, who said that her heating costs have increased by 50% in two years. She thought that was totally unacceptable.

Bill C-454 is needed to help people like that and to supervise the oil industry more carefully. We hope the bill will be adopted.

• (1900)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Essex, who normally would have 10 minutes, will have only 8 minutes because I will have to interrupt.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part today in the second reading debate of Bill C-454, An Act to amend the Competition Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

My intention is to outline the provisions of Bill C-454, which proposes extensive amendments to the Competition Act.

Bill C-454 contains a number of provisions that were in earlier legislation, specifically Bill C-19. However, Bill C-454 not only alters some of the provisions that were in Bill C-19, but also introduces some new provisions.

The House should not make the mistake of thinking that Bill C-454 is merely Bill C-19 by another name. This is a very different bill in many important ways.

As such, I would caution my hon. colleagues to give this bill very serious attention. Any amendments to the Competition Act will be of great interest to a wide range of stakeholders across Canada.

To show how great an interest, I would refer hon. members to the Competition Policy Review Panel. As hon. members will recall, in July of 2007 the government announced the creation of the panel, which has as the central part of its mandate a review of key elements of Canada's competition and investment policies, including the Competition Act. In the context of its consultations, the panel received approximately 140 written submissions.

Given the importance of the Competition Act for Canadians, I would like to take a few minutes to review some of the provisions of Bill C-454.

First, there are some provisions in Bill C-454 that are the same as those in Bill C-19. For example, Bill C-454 would decriminalize the price discrimination, predatory pricing, discriminatory promotional allowances and geographic price discrimination provisions of the Competition Act. These provisions would then be dealt with under the non-criminal abuse of dominance provisions of the act.

Bill C-454 proposes to allow the tribunal to order restitution to consumers affected by deceptive marketing practices. In addition, the bill gives the tribunal new power to impose interim injunctions to stop the disposal of assets by anyone engaged in deceptive marketing practices. This is to ensure that there is property available for such restitution.

However, there are several key provisions in Bill C-454 that are different from what was contained in Bill C-19. Bill C-454 proposes to add three different types of financial consequences to deter abuse of dominance. I understand that all three would be applied at the same time.

First, the Competition Tribunal could order an administrative monetary penalty, or AMP, against individuals and companies that engage in anti-competitive conduct: up to \$10 million for a first offence and up to \$15 million for each subsequent one.

Second, Bill C-454 gives the tribunal the ability to order an additional AMP on top of the one I just mentioned. This second AMP would be an amount not greater than the profits generated by the anti-competitive conduct in question.

In addition to these two AMPs, Bill C-454 would allow private parties to pursue separate private litigation before the Competition Tribunal when they believe that a dominant firm has abused its market position. At present, only the Commissioner of Competition may bring abuse of dominance matters to the tribunal. In relation to private access to the tribunal, Bill C-454 includes a provision to grant the tribunal the ability to award damages to private parties.

Next, Bill C-454 introduces a proposal to change the definition of “anti-competitive act” for the purposes of the abuse of dominance provision. Bill C-454 would introduce the concept of “exploitative conduct” into the Competition Act. In other jurisdictions, particularly the European Union, this phrase has been taken to mean excessive pricing or price gouging.

As I understand it, an attempt to deal with price gouging would be viewed as a form of price regulation that would have far-reaching implications for the Canadian marketplace. As such, this provision should be carefully considered.

As we know, price regulation is essentially a matter of provincial jurisdiction. I am quite sure that the sponsor of the bill and his colleagues would not want to intrude on a matter of provincial jurisdiction.

•(1905)

Moving on to the issue of deceptive marketing practices, Bill C-454 proposes a series of financial consequences. The provisions in Bill C-454 include an increase to the existing AMP: from \$50,000 to \$750,000 for individuals and from \$100,000 to \$10 million for corporations. For subsequent violations of the act, the proposed AMPs are \$1 million for individuals and \$15 million for corporations.

At the same time, Bill C-454 provides for an additional AMP for deceptive marketing practices, up to the amount of profits generated by the practices. Again, it appears that both AMPs could be ordered by the tribunal at the same time. Bill C-454 would also amend the list of factors the tribunal considers when determining the appropriate penalty for deceptive marketing practices.

Bill C-454 also amends the anti-cartel provision of the act, section 45. The proposed amendments would strike the word “unduly” from section 45 and raise the level of fines that would be imposed. Section 45 is one of the key provisions in the Competition Act.

Adjournment Proceedings

As I understand it, removing the word “unduly” could expose to criminal liability conduct currently regulated by provincial or federal law. For example, it is not clear whether provincial authorization of certain price-fixing arrangements, such as through marketing or supply management boards, would continue to shield such arrangements from criminal liability under section 45 if the amendments proposed in the bill are passed.

I see that my time is nearly up. Finally, I would like to say that Bill C-454 would change the rules regarding pre-notification of mergers, by lowering the threshold at which companies considering merging would have to notify the commissioner of their intent. In this regard, we should ask ourselves whether the costs imposed on businesses are warranted.

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

When we next reconsider Bill C-454, there will be three minutes remaining for the hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Essex.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

LNG TERMINALS

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking tonight on the question of LNG terminals.

Right across this country, we are looking at LNG terminals coming up on either coast. These liquefied natural gas tankers were considered by the Prime Minister to be too dangerous to go through the waters off New Brunswick, but when it came to standing up for the people of Quebec about the same terminals going in near the city of Quebec, he was okay with that. We have seen that the Rabaska terminal received federal approval on February 28.

Surely the tragic happenings of the ferry off the coast of British Columbia has alerted us to the dangers that we can have with extended tanker traffic and large ship traffic in our waters.

A report by the U.S. department of energy on LNG tanker safety, considered conservative in its findings, identified that damages to persons or property from a tank explosion would cover an area of 1,600 metres in radius, a circle of over three kilometres across, from an accident. An exploding vapour cloud from an LNG tanker hit by a terrorist attack could cause damages as far away as 2,500 metres. If more than one LNG tank exploded, these amounts would increase by up to 30%.

In 2004 there was a tragic explosion and fire at the LNG facility in Algeria where 27 people were killed and 56 were injured. It was an explosion caused by a leak in a pipe. The blast was felt miles from the site.

In 1979 an explosion at the LNG plant at Cove Point, Maryland, killed one and caused extensive damages.

Adjournment Proceedings

In 1973 an explosion at an LNG plant in Staten Island, New York, killed 37, and this list goes on.

These facilities are hazardous in their nature. They are not really the kinds of facilities we want to locate in a narrow river which is only 305 metres wide at the Rabaska site. Right in the middle of a very populated area of Quebec City, celebrating its 400th year this year, is a very serious place to put an LNG terminal.

In 2002 the city of Boston denied permission for an LNG tanker to enter that city's port. The Boston fire chief said he did not believe any fire department could put out an initial fire if a ship were struck, due to the rapid burn rate of the gas.

A Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor who studied LNG tanker safety for the American National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration warned that a strike against an LNG tanker could spark a huge inferno that would scorch and kill nearby residents, set waterfront buildings ablaze, and shoot searing electromagnetic waves into neighbourhoods that could spark even more fires.

We are talking about a product whereby once the terminal is established, we are going to see an ongoing procession of these ships up the St. Lawrence Seaway in the midst of 40 million tonnes of cargo that are moved there on some 3,000 ships, constantly, for decades and decades to come.

When we look at the location and the set-up for these, and I am not talking about the relative merit of LNG but the location and set-up of these types of facilities, if we are just simply taking the—

• (1910)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the question raised by my colleague from Western Arctic.

Indeed, since the member asked this question on December 6, 2007, this government has granted its approval to the proposed LNG project in Rabaska.

This decision was announced on March 4, 2008. It was rendered following a very lengthy and rigorous analysis which included a number of departments at the federal and provincial level.

Safety and security is this Conservative government's primary responsibility and we take it very seriously. Let me provide a little bit of context.

This LNG project has the potential to be a tremendous benefit to the Quebec economy. The Quebec government supported the proposal and asked us to do a review of the report of the environmental assessment joint panel review.

This government's job is to ensure that if a project like this is to proceed, it does not pose a significant risk to the environment or to the health of Canadians.

A comprehensive environmental assessment has indeed been completed and it has shown that this particular project is safe from an environmental point of view.

Now that the entire process has been completed, the federal government concludes that the Quebec government and the developer can indeed pursue the procedures for implementing the eventual Rabaska LNG terminal. It is safe.

Should the project move forward, the Government of Canada will indeed ensure that the developer implements all mitigation measures identified in the report, as well as the required monitoring and review programs. There is ongoing monitoring to make sure that the project remains safe as well.

My colleague has made reference to the LNG project in Passamaquoddy Bay in southwestern New Brunswick. As the member knows full well, each and every case is different and unique. Indeed, all of them need to undergo a very rigorous federal environmental review. Each case is judged on its own merits based on its safety, the security issues, and indeed environmental issues.

In the case of Rabaska, a review was conducted and was shown to be safe from an environmental and safety perspective, and in the best interests of the people of Quebec. We are going to act on their behalf in this case.

In keeping with our commitment to protect the environment, the panel recommended several mitigation and follow-up measures should the project proceed.

Twelve recommendations pertain to federal areas of responsibility, implicating Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Transport Canada, Environment Canada and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada, and this government will ensure that appropriate follow-up measures are implemented to monitor the effectiveness of mitigation measures and ensure compliance with any conditions that are eventually set out in the regulatory approvals or authorizations that may be issued under the Fisheries Act and the Navigable Waters Protection Act.

Therefore, any such conditions will only be known for certain at the time of those approvals or authorizations.

I am happy to inform this particular member, because I know he is interested in it, and all members of this House, and in fact all Canadians, that this Conservative government and this Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has finally acted to review and modernize the Navigable Waters Protection Act which is applicable in this particular case.

This act was written in 1882 and is one of the oldest pieces of legislation in Canada.

The provisions contained within this act do not serve the people of Canada any longer for the purpose for which they were intended. A new, more flexible regime must be established for the review of works constructed in Canadian waters. It is long overdue.

The act is currently being studied by our committee and we are getting the job done.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1915)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, those certainly are not reassuring words to me. The first words of the hon. member's presentation were the tremendous benefit that this was to the economy. That is not the issue here.

The issue here is safety. The issue is the fact that we are putting a terminal in a very difficult location on a well-travelled and used seaway that will most likely expand its use in the future. We are adding to the use. We are adding to the danger that is inherent in any busy traffic area.

This terminal could have been put in other locations. This terminal did not have to go where it is.

I do not want to talk about the benefits of LNG. I do not think there are any. I think it is a negative loss to Canada's economy.

If the Conservative government would have taken heed of the Canada first energy policy, we would not be in this fix.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be representing the people of Fort McMurray—Athabasca. Last year on the highway that goes north to Fort McMurray, 23 people lost their lives as a result of the highway not being twinned.

Fortunately, this government has put \$150 million plus into twinning that highway and it will be done. I can assure the member that if we stop driving our cars in Canada, we will have no more car accidents, but that does not seem like a very plausible possibility.

Indeed, we will move forward on the safety and security of Canadians, the health of Canadians, and the environment. We will ensure the economy keeps going for the people of Quebec. That is what we are going to do on this side of the House.

• (1920)

[*Translation*]

THE FRANCOPHONIE

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 6, I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for La Francophonie a question, and he talked about his attachment to his mother tongue and gave us a lecture because we asked him why he addressed the audience at the gala of the Canada-Arab Business Council solely in English.

Of the 22 countries in the Arab world, five are part of the Francophonie: Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia. Algeria calls French its second language. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for La Francophonie perhaps does not know that 29 states in the world list French as their official language, and more than 200 million people speak our language.

The minister is a francophone and meets with representatives of countries who are not anglophones. There is no justification for not using the language that Canada has in common with a good number of these Arab countries, that is, French. Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for la Francophonie "shocked many people, on January 30, when he spoke only in English in Canada's capital to a group of MPs, business people and diplomats, including francophones" reported the Montreal daily, *La Presse*, "Several witnesses to the minister's gaffe...were forthcoming: the minister did not speak

one word of French, not even a thank you". This is shocking behaviour for the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for la Francophonie, and it is outright scandalous since he sits at the table of the ministerial conference of the Francophonie on the international scene. This demonstrates this government's lack of consideration for the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and lack of regard for the French language. For this government, the language of oil is English.

How can a francophone Quebec MP justify his lack of regard for his mother tongue? How can the Minister of la Francophonie justify his lack of consideration for member countries? How can a Conservative who boasts about obtaining recognition for the Quebec nation justify hiding the language of this nation?

This subservient attitude led the minister to reply that "it was nothing". He added that "the member is trying to make something out of nothing. He is exaggerating. His comments are exaggerated." This attitude is shameful. Quebec no longer hides. This government, which wants to propose a new action plan on official languages, has relegated French to the position of a second language of lesser importance. If the Quebec ministers in this government wish to rise through the ranks, they had better speak English.

He does not even realize what message he is sending to the international community as Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of la Francophonie. He did not even apologize for this insult. It is unfortunate, most unfortunate, but typical of his government. How can he justify such shameful behaviour?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one very important question still remains before this House, and I would like to ask it now. What has the Bloc Québécois ever done for French Canadians?

The Bloc Québécois has been in Ottawa for 15 years now and they have absolutely nothing to show to their constituents. Their record: zero. As the opposition member well knows, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is a francophone. He is a proud Quebecer and Canadian, through and through.

To question the minister's loyalty to his own language is a disgrace. It is ironic that the opposition member should attack the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Does he not know that, last year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs agreed to chair the ministerial conference of the Francophonie for the next two years?

At the end of his participation at the conference in Vientiane, Laos on November 20 and 21, 2007, the minister underscored to his counterparts from across the francophonie Canada's priorities during his mandate. As we all know, beautiful Quebec City will be hosting the 12th Francophonie Summit in October 2008. Canada will chair the summit, and we will be the co-hosts, along with the Government of Quebec. It will be the third francophonie summit to be held in Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

This event will give Canada's Francophonie an exceptional opportunity to demonstrate its vitality, its energy and its contribution to the international Francophonie. The minister himself put it well when he said that the Francophonie is an international organization that has done much to promote and strengthen French language and culture throughout the world. French language and culture have been at the heart of Canada's identity since our country was founded.

Allow me to note that in a few days, my government will join millions of francophones across Canada and around the world to celebrate International Day of La Francophonie. Canada is proud to be a member of the Francophonie family. Our participation in this organization bears witness to our country's socio-cultural reality. French is one of Canada's founding languages, and it is spoken by nine million Canadians. The francophone and francophile community is a large one, and it is an integral part of Canada's identity, one that makes us unique. In recognition of the French fact in Canada, the federal government has played a leading role in promoting the Francophonie both nationally and internationally.

Beginning in the 1960s, Canada has been a leader in promoting the Francophonie through active participation in the creation and development of its many institutions. Since the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie was created in 1970 in Niamey, Niger, Canada has either founded or joined all of the Francophonie's multilateral institutions, and now plays a leading role in them.

Our government therefore fully supports efforts to promote the development of francophone communities in Canada. The Francophonie enables Canada to create essential links with other francophone countries around the world.

Our government is working to build a stronger, safer, better Canada, a Canada that succeeds because of its proud, hard-working people. We are a united, respected country, a magnificent country whose history, identity and future have been and will continue to be forged by francophones.

• (1925)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, as I said, on February 6, I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is also Canada's Minister for la Francophonie, a question to bring to the House's attention the fact that he spoke solely in English at the gala of the Canada-Arab Business Council. For a minister of la Francophonie, that is totally unacceptable.

Perhaps he does not know that in several Arab countries, French is used as a second language, and that a number of them are part of the Francophonie.

The fact that this minister, who boasts about recognizing the Quebec nation, does not even deign to speak French—which is his first language, to boot—when giving a speech in public, shows a flagrant lack of respect for the Francophonie.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, here is what Canada has done. The Government of Canada is the second largest supporter, after France, of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and francophone institutions and contributes approximately \$35 million annually.

In addition, the Government of Canada has already committed \$57 million for planning the 12th summit of la Francophonie, which will take place in Quebec City in October 2008.

We have a proud record of supporting la Francophonie—a record the Bloc will never be able to lay claim to.

[English]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak tonight to a question that I asked of the minister shortly before the budget came down. It had to do with students and the important need that Canada has to educate young Canadians.

I asked specifically about student grants and I talked about loans. My question had two parts. One part had to do with the Millennium Scholarship Foundation. I had guessed in my question that the government might be trying to get rid of the Millennium Scholarship Foundation. I asked the minister if his government was going to get rid of the Millennium Scholarship Foundation or rebrand it some way in Tory blue. One did not have to be Kreskin to know that the government was going to get rid of a program that worked, a program that the Liberal Party had brought in.

What the government did with the program is no improvement at all. I think it is much worse. What is even worse is the justification. The budget indicates that the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation is also a significant intrusion into provincial jurisdiction. Every province and territory in Canada loved the Millennium Scholarship Foundation and advocated for its renewal but the government killed it and, I suspect, we will have another Canada summer jobs fiasco like we had last year.

However, I want to talk about student loans because every time a question has been asked about student loans in the last little while we have heard that there is a great review going on in the Canada student loans system and we should wait because we will love it. The minister and his department would not have had to go very far to get some great ideas. It could have done a lot of stuff.

The student organizations in Canada, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations and the Coalition for Student Loan Fairness, which is headed by spokesperson, Julian Benedict, who I had a chance to visit with recently in British Columbia, came out with eight points and I just want to talk about a couple of the really important points that were in their plan, which was made quite public.

The most significant thing that could be done with student loans to make it a better system for Canada and the one that they highlighted as their number one need would be to reduce or eliminate the interest rates on student loans. A number of countries are doing interesting things with student loan rates. Some countries do not charge rates on student loans. Some charge cost of borrowing.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Canadian student loan program charges between 8.75% and up on student loans. It does not make any sense. In the economic update of 2005, brought in by the member for Wascana, then the minister of finance, pledged a complete overhaul of the student loan system. One of the things we would have done, I am quite sure, is to have looked at that and asked if it made sense, because I do not think it does. Why would we not reduce it to the cost of government borrowing, which could be just over half of the rate we are charging? Why would we want to squeeze money out of Canadian students or have a disincentive for kids to go to university?

How about their recommendation on a student loan ombudsman so that students could actually navigate the system better? Again, in the budget some \$123 million were provided but it was very vague as to what it would do. It would have been a very simple positive step for Canadian students and former students who are debilitated by this debt, who get out of university with a mortgage but no house. If we had given some signal to them that there would be an ombudsman or commissioner of student loan fairness, that would have been particularly helpful to them.

Enforcing collection derivatives and increasing the interest relief period. Here is another one, not necessarily from the coalition but that all parliamentarians have heard. Medical students should not have to repay their loans with interest while they are still residents and not making a full family income.

These are not new ideas. These are things that could have been enacted. This student loan review was not sufficient. It did not get the job done. I think it could have been a lot better for Canadian students and they are disappointed.

•(1930)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. He is on committee with me. I commend him on his leadership and the seriousness and consciousness that he exhibits at committee.

However, I do have to say he is unreasonable when it comes to acknowledging the highly principled work that we do for students and post-secondary education. For example, he has been quoted as saying he does not know whether students should laugh or cry over government policies on post-secondary education.

On February 26 the Canadian Federation of Students had this to say about the budget:

By implementing a national system of grants, the government has responded to a long standing call by students and their families...

Or how about this:

The new system ensures that the money will go directly into the pockets of students who need it most.

The government is committed to creating the best educated, most skilled, most flexible workforce in the world. We are following through on that commitment by making significant investments in the post-secondary education system.

The government believes that education is the great enabler. It is allowing young people to gain the knowledge and skills for a job in today's economy and allows Canadians to move out of poverty and into the world of opportunity.

This is why budget 2008 made significant investments in post-secondary education and in students by creating a new Canada student grant program that will support Canadian students with a \$350 million investment in 2009-10, rising to \$430 million by 2012-13.

I would like to remind my hon. colleague that he was an MP in the previous government, a government that cut \$25 billion from the provinces. The Liberals' only bragging right is a failed millennium scholarship program which did not help the students most in need. The actions of this government are a breath of fresh air for parents and students after the failed record of the previous government.

These grants will provide predictable, stable and transparent funding to students, helping them make better plans. It will be available to students on an equal basis. It will apply to college and university students. Most important, the grant will be targeted to those students who are most in need of the support.

If they qualify for a federal student loan, students from lower income families will be eligible for \$250 per month for every year of their undergraduate study or college program, up to four years. Students from middle income families will be eligible for \$100 per month.

I would also like to take a minute to point out that the actions this government has taken will support more than 100,000 more students than the poor, failed Liberal approach to student support.

The member talked about an ombudsman. We do not need an ombudsman. Our student program will be so much better. It will be streamlined. It will be efficient. It will be effective. An ombudsman was only needed when the Liberals were running the student loan program.

•(1935)

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I enjoy working with the parliamentary secretary on committee.

There is nothing more critical for this country than to maximize its human resource potential, and the Conservative government is not taking that seriously.

It killed the millennium scholarship foundation. The foundation was supported by every province and territory. It ignores the needs of the most vulnerable. Its vaunted review of the student loan program ignored the major suggestions of students and advocates.

Let me be specific. To whom were the Conservatives listening? Let me be more specific. Did they talk to the Canadian Federation of Students? Did they talk to CASA? Did they ever meet with the Coalition for Student Loan Fairness? If not, why not?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, actually, I quoted from the Canadian Federation of Students which stated on February 26:

Adjournment Proceedings

By implementing a national system of grants, the government has responded to a long standing call by students and their families...

The new system ensures that the money will go directly into the pockets of students who need it most.

This government is committed to ensuring that Canada has the best educated, most skilled, most flexible workforce in the world. That is why we committed in budget 2008 to an investment of \$3.2 billion in post-secondary education through the Canada social transfer. I want to point out to my hon. friend that this is a 40% increase over the Liberal funding levels. The increase stands in stark contrast to the \$25 billion that the previous Liberal government cut from the provinces in the 1990s.

The new Canada student grant program will provide more money for more students for more years of study than the failed Liberal approach.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:39 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, March 13, 2008

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Canadian Security Intelligence Service	
Mr. MacKenzie	4095
Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Lukiwski	4095
Interparliamentary Delegations	
Mr. Hiebert	4095
Committees of the House	
Finance	
Mr. Merrifield	4095
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mr. Doyle	4095
Public Safety and National Security	
Mr. Breitreuz	4095
Organ Donor Registry Act	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	4095
Bill C-527. Introduction and first reading	4095
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	4096
Criminal Code	
Mr. Comartin	4096
Bill C-528. Introduction and first reading	4096
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	4096
Petitions	
Abolition of Nuclear Weapons	
Mr. Dewar	4096
Food Additives	
Mr. Dewar	4096
Firearms Registry	
Mr. Warkentin	4096
Human Trafficking	
Mrs. Smith	4096
Age of Consent	
Mrs. Smith	4096
Sri Lanka	
Mr. Wrzesnewskyj	4096
Firearms Registry	
Ms. Chow	4096
Undocumented Workers	
Ms. Chow	4097
Income Trusts	
Mr. Szabo	4097
Bill C-484	
Mr. Epp	4097
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	4097

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Afghanistan	
Motion	4097
Mrs. Smith	4097
Mr. Crête	4099
Ms. Black	4099
Mr. Calkins	4100
Mr. Dewar	4101
Mr. Crête	4102
Mr. Comartin	4102
Mr. Lunney	4104
Mr. Ignatieff	4104
Mr. Hawn	4105
Ms. Neville	4105
Mr. Albrecht	4107
Mr. Dewar	4107
Mr. Simard	4107
Mr. Chong	4108
Mr. Dewar	4109
Points of Order	
Ways and Means Motion No. 10—Speaker's Ruling	
The Speaker	4109

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Afghanistan	
Motion	4110
Mrs. Hinton	4110
Mr. Dewar	4112
Mrs. Gallant	4112
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	4114
Mr. Albrecht	4114
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	4114
Mr. Albrecht	4116
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	4116
Mr. Scarpaleggia	4117
Mr. Chong	4117
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	4117
Mr. Hawn	4120
Ms. Charlton	4121
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	4121
Mr. Chong	4122
Mr. Bevington	4123
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	4123
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	4124
Mr. Harvey	4125
Mr. Tonks	4125
Mr. Bigras	4126

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Global Citizen Week	
Mr. Cannan	4127

Rosalinda Cantiveros	
Ms. Neville.....	4127
Morin Heights Tragedy	
Mr. Mulcair.....	4127
Marouane Aboudraz	
Mr. Lussier.....	4128
Royden Taylor	
Mrs. Skelton.....	4128
Kidney Disease	
Mr. Temelkovski.....	4128
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada	
Mr. Casson.....	4128
Canada Post	
Mr. St-Cyr.....	4128
Human Rights	
Mr. Sweet.....	4129
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada	
Ms. Bennett.....	4129
The Environment	
Mr. Blaney.....	4129
Health Care	
Mrs. Mathysen.....	4129
National Francophonie Week	
Mr. Simard.....	4129
Tragedy in Morin Heights	
Mr. Laframboise.....	4130
French language Media	
Mr. Bélanger.....	4130
Liberal Party of Canada	
Mr. Lake.....	4130
Vacancy	
Saint-Lambert	
The Speaker.....	4130

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ethics	
Mr. Dion.....	4130
Mr. Harper.....	4131
Mr. Dion.....	4131
Mr. Harper.....	4131
Mr. Dion.....	4131
Mr. Harper.....	4131
Mr. Ignatieff.....	4131
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	4131
Mr. Ignatieff.....	4131
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	4131
Mr. Duceppe.....	4131
Mr. Harper.....	4131
Mr. Duceppe.....	4132
Mr. Harper.....	4132
Mr. Duceppe.....	4132

Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	4132
Mr. Duceppe.....	4132
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	4132
Government Accountability	
Mr. Layton.....	4132
Mr. Harper.....	4132
Canada-U.S. Relations	
Mr. Layton.....	4132
Mr. Harper.....	4133
Ethics	
Mr. Dryden.....	4133
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	4133
Mr. Dryden.....	4133
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	4133
Mrs. Jennings.....	4133
Mr. Van Loan.....	4133
Mrs. Jennings.....	4133
Mr. Hanger.....	4133
Afghanistan	
Mrs. Barbot.....	4134
Mr. MacKay.....	4134
Mrs. Barbot.....	4134
Mr. MacKay.....	4134
Public Works and Government Services	
Ms. Bourgeois.....	4134
Mr. Van Loan.....	4134
Airbus	
Mrs. Lavallée.....	4134
Mr. Van Loan.....	4134
Justice	
Mr. Dion.....	4134
Mr. Nicholson.....	4134
Mr. Dion.....	4134
Mr. Nicholson.....	4135
Afghanistan	
Mr. Ignatieff.....	4135
Mr. MacKay.....	4135
Ethics	
Mr. Ignatieff.....	4135
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	4135
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Warkentin.....	4135
Mr. Bernier.....	4135
Afghanistan	
Ms. Black.....	4135
Mr. MacKay.....	4135
Ms. Black.....	4135
Mr. MacKay.....	4136
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mr. Bevilacqua (Vaughan).....	4136
Ms. Finley.....	4136
Ms. Beaumier.....	4136
Ms. Finley.....	4136

Science and Technology	
Mr. Brison	4136
Mr. Prentice	4136
Mr. Brison	4136
Mr. Prentice	4136
HIV-AIDS	
Ms. Gagnon	4137
Mr. Clement	4137
Rivière-Rouge—Mont-Tremblant International Airport	
Ms. Deschamps	4137
Mr. Day	4137
Airbus	
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	4137
Mr. Van Loan	4137
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Norlock	4137
Mr. Bernier	4137
Fisheries	
Ms. Bell (Vancouver Island North)	4138
Mr. Hearn	4138
Agriculture	
Mr. Layton	4138
Mr. Ritz	4138
Canada-U.S. Relations	
Mr. Bains	4138
Mr. Bernier	4138
Ontario Economy	
Mr. Miller	4138
Mr. Flaherty	4138
Privilege	
Oral Question	
Mr. Godin	4139
Mr. Nadeau	4139
Points of Order	
Decorum in the Chamber	
Mrs. Hinton	4139
Alleged Violation of Elections Act	
Mr. Holland	4140
Mr. Kenney	4140
Mr. Bélanger	4140
Tabling of Document	
Mr. MacKay	4140
Ways and Means	
Motion No. 10	
Mr. Flaherty	4140
Motion for concurrence	4140
Motion agreed to	4141
Message from the Senate	
The Speaker	4141

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Public Safety and National Security

Mr. Hill	4141
Motion	4141
(Motion agreed to)	4142

Citizenship and Immigration

Mr. Hill	4142
Motion	4142
(Motion agreed to)	4142

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Hill	4142
Motion	4142
(Motion agreed to)	4142

National Defence

Mr. Hill	4142
Motion	4142
(Motion agreed to)	4142

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Afghanistan

Motion	4142
Mr. Bigras	4142
Mr. Pacetti	4143
Mr. Albrecht	4145
Mr. Tonks	4145
Mr. Kramp	4146
Mr. Albrecht	4147
Mr. Toews	4147
Mr. Albrecht	4148
Mr. Benoit	4149
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	4149
Mr. Kramp	4149
Mr. Ignatieff	4151
Mr. Benoit	4151
Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte)	4151
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	4153
Mr. Benoit	4154
Mr. Simms	4154
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	4155
Ms. Ratansi	4156

Royal Assent

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Afghanistan

Motion	4157
Mr. Stanton	4157
Amendment negatived	4159
Motion agreed to	4161

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Competition Act

Mr. Gaudet	4161
Bill C-454, Second reading	4161
Mr. Carrie	4162

Mr. Laframboise	4163
Mr. Carrie	4163
Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	4165
Ms. Nash	4166
Mrs. DeBellefeuille	4167
Mr. Van Kesteren	4168

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

LNG Terminals	
Mr. Bevington	4169

Mr. Jean	4170
----------------	------

The Francophonie

Mr. Nadeau	4171
Mrs. Boucher	4171

Post-Secondary Education

Mr. Savage	4172
Mrs. Yelich	4173

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En case de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :**
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

**Additional copies may be obtained from Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: (613) 941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: (613) 954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@pwgsc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>**

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.

**On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires ou la version française de cette publication en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : (613) 941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : (613) 954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>**