

## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[Adjournment Proceedings]

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A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved

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[English]

Afghanistan



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

Madam Speaker, in May I rose in the House to ask the government with regard to the issue of a special envoy for Pakistan-Afghanistan.

The United States, Great Britain, France and the EU have all assigned a special envoy to the region. Given the importance of Pakistan, particularly with regard to the Taliban and the current situation in Waziristan, et cetera, it is important that we have an envoy on the ground and certainly subject to our resolution.

One of the government priorities, priority number 4, talks about the need to deal with Pakistan and Afghanistan much more effectively, and that we have a special representative who can report back, not only to government but to Parliament to enhance the relationship, to understand what is going on the ground. We want to build better institutions there with the EU and the United States. Because of the changing strategies that President Obama announced back in March, this needs to be done.

The government failed to respond, other than saying it has a high commissioner in Pakistan and an ambassador in Afghanistan. That is fine, but it does not go far enough in terms of the realities. We have 2,500 troops on the ground. We have committed those men and women to the struggle in Afghanistan, and we need to ensure that we emphasize as much on the diplomatic front as possible.

Unfortunately, the government has not seemed to do so. Even in General McChrystal's assessment recently, that was done in August for the president, he indicated very clearly the need for this type of strategy, the fact that the Taliban are in Pakistan, that there is a porous border and they go across.

I am sure that my hon. colleague across the way understands that this diplomatic push for a special envoy is in Canada's best interest, it is in Afghanistan's best interest and of course it is in Pakistan's best interest. Besides that, we need to engage India and China. China, of course, is concerned about issues in its western territory, the fact that fundamentalism, particularly linkages with al-Qaeda, is clear and evident. The government could be doing more if we had a special envoy to engage the Chinese in this regard. We should certainly engage the Indians as well.

There is no question that there is a new phase in the situation on the ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are linked very strongly and we need to ensure that we have all the best diplomatic efforts possible put forth, both in Islamabad and Pakistan.

The special envoy, as I say, is something others have clearly done. They recognized the need. The EU does not even have any troops, obviously, because it is a political organization, yet it found that this was necessary. Certainly the British, the French and the United States have found it necessary. We need to be there to be a major player.

In terms of this diplomatic engagement, we need to ensure that we have the best intelligence possible. We need to be able to share that. We also need to ensure that as a participant in the war on terrorism and certainly the situation in Afghanistan, that we are able to communicate directly what it is we are saying to all capitals in the region and with the same voice. Unfortunately, at the present time, we do not have that.

The government's response in May was basically to slough it off. However, the government, I am sure, recognizes today that with the change in strategy and with General McChrystal's report to the president, this is a reality that needs to be addressed now. I would hope that when I hear from my friends on the other side, they will be more open to the need for this type of diplomatic engagement, because again, it is in our national interest to do so.

  (1825)

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**Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** 

Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand in the House and capitalize on this opportunity to discuss the government's approach to Afghanistan.

First, allow me to review the nature of Canada's commitment to Afghanistan and our government's effective priorities, namely diplomatic, development and reconstruction.

I would like to take a moment and remind the House and the members currently present that on March 13, 2008, in this very chamber we voted on a motion of the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, which stipulated that our government's contribution to Afghanistan would:

—be revamped and increased to strike a better balance between our military efforts and our development efforts in Afghanistan;

Following the motion, this government carried out an extensive review, an assessment process to define Canadian priorities and programming for Afghanistan. As a result of the work of many on this side of the House, Canada's mission in Afghanistan now has a greater emphasis on reconstruction, development and diplomacy.

The government identified six key strategic priorities for Canada's engagement in Afghanistan for the 2008-2011 period, namely: first, enable the Afghan National Security Forces in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order; second, strengthen Afghan institutional capacity to deliver basic services and promote job-oriented economic growth, enhancing the confidence of Kandaharis in their government; third, provide humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons; fourth, enhance border security through facilitation of bilateral dialogue between Afghan and Pakistan authorities; fifth, build national institutions that are central to our Kandahar priorities and support democratic processes, such as elections; and sixth, facilitate Afghan-led efforts toward political reconciliation.

Helping our government to deliver on these priorities and commitments over the last year our civilian presence in Afghanistan doubled. Today over 100 Canadian civilians are working in Afghanistan, including personnel from DFAIT, CIDA, the RCMP and Correctional Service Canada.

This coordinated effort is an excellent example of our Conservative government's whole of government approach to the mission in Afghanistan. Our civilian partners work in a very challenging environment. These individuals exemplify the ideals of the Canadian mission and our government's streamlined priorities.

On the question of envoys, the fact is different countries have different approaches and mechanisms in place. We on the government side are less concerned with the actual title our officials carry than we are with the actual work they carry out and the quality of our assistance in Afghanistan.

The key is the Canadians working for Afghanistan, both on the ground in Afghanistan and here in Canada, are among the best and the brightest the world has to offer.

The hon. member asked for leadership. Allow me to clearly state, here it is, we have it. We are delivering real results. The results are far more important than the semantics and the titles. On this side of the House, we know this. It is time for the opposition to figure it out, too.

Our government clearly indicated its commitment by putting a senior ambassador in Afghanistan. Our ambassador to Afghanistan, William Crosbie, and our High Commissioner in Pakistan, Randolph Mank, worked very closely together coordinating our government's efforts at the regional level.

The work of the government also focuses on broader issues. We see no necessity for a special envoy.

  (1830)

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**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** 

Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague very carefully.

First, I am a bit disappointed in the partisanship in his comments, given the fact that the resolution which this House adopted, and which I and my colleagues were part of, was a non-political resolution. It was for Canada's interest, not for the Conservative Party's interest.

There is an integrated strategy that is going on with Afghanistan, Pakistan, et cetera. The issue is not about semantics. The issue is not about titles. The issue about this. Are we adopting and are we adapting quickly enough to these new strategies? Are we prepared to in fact have the integrated approach that is needed in responding to what is going on across the border involving India, China, et cetera?

Clearly we can take different paths, as the member said. There seems to be a common thread here. The British who have the second largest contingent in Afghanistan, the Americans who have the largest, the French who are there and even the EU, as I pointed out, all believe this integrated strategy requires a special envoy who can get the kind of information and be able to disseminate it in a way which is very effective. Again, in his report General McChrystal praises this approach as well.

I would suggest that this issue is integrated strategy. The envoy is part of an integrated strategy. I would hope all members in the House, not just on the government side, and I mean the vice-chair of the defence committee, et cetera, can see the non-partisanship that goes on there.

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**Hon. Jim Abbott:** 

Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that at the political level, I believe within the G8 we have a cabinet committee comprising senior members whose sole purpose is to focus on, guide, and provide political leadership to oversee Canada's engagement in Afghanistan.

Without any question, our government is fully engaged in this issue and is doing what needs to be done, notwithstanding the titles that the member may or may not wish to have. Titles are easy to apply. For us to get the job done is more difficult, and that is exactly what we are doing.

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Aboriginal Affairs 

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**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** 

Madam Speaker, I am rising on a question that I raised in May to do with the Auditor General's report from 2008 on first nations child and family services. I had asked the minister a question about when the government would live up its responsibility to consult first nations and appropriately fund the child and family services program.

To put it into context, I want to briefly refer to the Auditor General's report in which she indicates the severity of the problem, as shown by the INAC data, in that about 5% of first nations children living on-reserve are in care. This is almost eight times the number of children in care residing off-reserve. She also points out that according to a parallel audit that was done, 51% of children in care in British Columbia are aboriginal. These are pretty shocking numbers.

The Auditor General also indicates in the report that under federal and provincial policies, aboriginal children including first nations children should have equitable access to services comparable in level and quality to those provided to other children.

Subsequently the department came before the public accounts committee and reported on some of its action plan, but part of the heart of this matter is the fact that there is a differential between what the provinces pay for off-reserve children and what on-reserve children are entitled to.

In a letter that came out on August 19, 2009 the department states that

...INAC cannot commit to conducting such a comprehensive review nor can it be done for all jurisdictions by the timelines required by the Committee. INAC would be able to provide a basic comparison of jurisdictions that are currently under the Enhanced Prevention [program] and