

Canadian mission in Afghanistan recognized at Queen's Park

In a moving tribute March 17, the leaders of the three political parties in the Ontario Legislature paid tribute to the Canadians who served in Afghanistan.

The following is the Hansard record of the remarks given by Premier Kathleen Wynne, Official Opposition Leader Tim Hudak, and Third Party Leader Andrea Horwath. It was provided by Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones' office.

Premier Kathleen Wynne ? Speaker, last week all three parties asked that the Canadian flag at the Ontario Legislature be lowered to half-mast to mark the end of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. We did this to recognize the service of the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who served in Afghanistan and to honour those who have lost their lives serving our country.

We are fortunate to live in a province and a country where we are able to express ourselves freely and where we are able to debate our political differences peacefully. These are the values our servicemen and servicewomen brought to their mission in Afghanistan. As Premier, and along with all MPPs in this Legislature, we pay tribute and honour those serving our country, and demonstrate our gratitude to these great men and women.

I would like to move unanimous consent that following remarks from all three parties, we observe a moment of silence for the Canadian men and women who have fallen as part of that mission.

Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak ? I'm pleased to join my colleague Premier Wynne and the leader of the third party, Ms. Horwath, in bringing remarks on the end of Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

The end of the mission in Afghanistan last week also marked the end of the longest war fought by the brave men and women in our Canadian Armed Forces. That longest war in our history was not without human cost. The war cost the lives of 158 soldiers, one diplomat, one journalist, two civilian contractors and, of course, beyond that, the uncountable injuries of both body and mind of those who did come home safely and of their families.

But much was won in Afghanistan in the fight against global terrorism and in the defence of freedom. One thing I noticed is that Canadians were often very modest about our accomplishments on the world stage, much more so than our neighbours to the south. I know all of us in our own ridings and across the province would find it immensely stirring during parades when the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces would march by, how the crowds would stand and cheer and salute and send out their thanks.

Canadians are immensely proud of our brave men and women in the military and their families.

I say with full assurance, and I know Canadians would agree, that despite our modesty as Canadians, there is nothing more fearsome to the enemy or comforting to the vanquished than the sight of a Canadian soldier in uniform-skilled, determined, incredibly courageous, and heroes all.

Speaker, I've yet to meet a Canadian soldier who has not defended Canada, answering the call post-9/11, who fights for freedom and safety for family and neighbours back at home. They're proud of what they've done. They also talk about the life-changing experiences that they had by helping to rebuild Afghanistan, by helping to spread what we take for granted in freedom, by building schools and communities, communities that were once schools and places of worship destroyed by the Taliban. As the father of a daughter-and I guess I'll say this, Speaker, of another little one to come-it made me immensely proud and it stirred my heart to see Afghani girls who can go to school safely.

When you're half a world away from the place you call home, when every day is a danger, it's quite an understatement to say that life can be tough, but it can also be incredibly elevating. Bringing hope to the hopeless is no easy task, but it is a task incredibly well done by the men and women of our armed forces.

As leader of the Ontario PCs and as a husband and a father who watched the many repatriations along the Highway of Heroes, I can only salute a job well done by each and every member of our Canadian Armed Forces. Our role now is to ensure those incredible sacrifices and works of valour are never forgotten.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath ? New Democrats stand together with the other members of the Legislature in honouring the immense sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform.

Spanning more than 12 years, the Canadian mission in Afghanistan cost the lives, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, of 158 soldiers, one diplomat, one journalist and two civilian contractors. Their friends and families have lost their loved ones forever. So we honour the memory of so many who lost their lives during the mission and so many others who continue to go on without them.

We need to be there for the veterans who have returned and are returning home. Veterans and their families need support:

Post-traumatic stress can have a devastating toll on soldiers and their loved ones. So as we stand in this Legislature today and mark the sacrifice, mark the commitment and mark the duty that sent so many soldiers over to Afghanistan, let us not forget that we have a duty to them as well, those who have returned, to make sure that they're able to cope with some of the things that they experienced,

witnessed and lived through in the horrors of that war.

The transition back to life at home can be difficult, and we need to ensure that people who served bravely get the support that they need at home. There shouldn't be any hesitation when it comes to not only helping the people who have returned, but also their loved ones and the families of our heroes.

The road toward lasting peace in Afghanistan is still a long one. The Canadian government must also redouble its efforts on development and diplomatic efforts to ensure that Canada can leave a true legacy that's lasting-of greater peace and of prosperity and freedom for all Afghans. I'm glad that the Leader of the Opposition mentioned the issue of education particularly. That is something New Democrats have always been supportive of, and I think Liberals and Conservatives as well.

The bottom line is, there are many positive things that Canadians contributed in Afghanistan, and one of the things that we want to ensure is that those contributions have a lasting legacy and we're able to see an Afghanistan that is truly supportive of all her people. The Speaker (Dave Levac) ? I would now ask that all members of the Legislature and those visiting please stand to observe a moment of silence, to honour those men and women who have completed their tours in Afghanistan, and those who have lost their lives, and their families.

The House observed a moment's silence.