

Liberal government falling short on NATO defence spending

BY DAVID TILSON

During his recent trip to Latvia and Belgium, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, announced that the Latvia mission, Operation REASSURANCE, will be extended to 2023 and that Canada will also increase the number of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members from 455 to 540. He also announced that Canada will command a mission in Iraq, beginning in fall 2018, which will include up to 250 CAF members and up to four Griffin helicopters. While this may appear to be a positive reaffirmation of our country's leadership when it comes to NATO, it is really an attempt to distract from the difficult conversations the Prime Minister was forced to have during the NATO summit after saying Canada will not reach its NATO spending targets. It's becoming increasingly clear to Canadians that Prime Minister Trudeau and the current Liberal government's defence policy amounts to empty promises.

There was considerable media coverage leading up to the NATO summit of U.S. President Donald Trump's assertion that Canada has come up short on its NATO defence spending commitments. The current Liberal government has claimed that its' committed to increasing defence spending; however, the reality is something different altogether, as they've failed to fund their own defence policy. Canadians remember the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party of Canada campaigned on a promise to ensure the CAF would be fully funded. Sadly, plans from the Department of National Defence show that the Liberals are shortchanging our military to the tune of \$4 billion when compared to the Liberal defence policy, Strong, Secure, and Engaged. Such figures confirm what we, the Conservative Official Opposition, have been saying for some time now that Prime Minister's Trudeau's defence policy is a book of empty promises which the current Liberal government has no intention of keeping.

We, the Conservative Official Opposition, will always support our brave men and women in uniform. We also recognize Canada has a duty to its NATO allies to achieve the aspirational defence spending target and Prime Minister Trudeau has failed to make meaningful progress. Due to his massive and sustained deficits, he has spent the cupboards bare and left Canada unable to do our part on the world stage. In the Prime Minister's first two budgets, he cut \$12 billion in defence spending and missed his own defence spending goal in Strong, Secure, Engaged by \$2 billion.

It's also unfortunate that Prime Minister Trudeau made the announcements on the Latvia and Iraq missions during the summer when Parliament has recessed for the summer, thus preventing any debate in Parliament. Decisions of this importance, especially involving members of the CAF, should not be made by the Prime Minister alone. However, this is not really surprising, given the announcement made by the current Liberal government back in March of a 12-month United Nations mission to Mali without any debate in Parliament.

Whether it's taking danger pay away from our brave men and women fighting ISIS terrorists, cutting the special allowance for our ill and injured troops, or botching the procurement process, it's clear that Prime Minister Trudeau continues to overpromise and under deliver. By failing to maintain Canada's military capabilities, he's not meeting the needs of our CAF.

In stark contrast, we the Conservative Party of Canada, will work towards meeting our NATO commitments, ensure that Canada is a reliable and trusted ally, and that those who serve our country are equipped with the resources they need to do the difficult jobs they are called upon to do every day on our behalf. We will stand up for members of the CAF as they've done with honour and pride for Canada.