

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? What did the release cost taxpayers?

First, the good news.

It is very nice that Canadian Colin Rutherford was recently released after five years of being held hostage by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Canada's new Foreign Affairs Minister, Stephane Dion ? who undoubtedly had little to do with it, since negotiations have been going on for years ? got to make the announcement in Ottawa that the Taliban ? and here's the laughable part ? decided to release Rutherford on ?humanitarian? grounds.

Clearly, the phrases ?Taliban? and ?humanitarian? simply don't go together. But there you are.

We are told that the government of Qatar was involved in the operation. And Afghani Police Chief General Aminullah Amarkhil said that Rutherford was released in the grazing province's remote Giro district. He said it involved a helicopter, and fighter jets flying overhead, to finally free the Canadian, who was scooped up by the Taliban in November, 2010.

Now, the bad news.

What on earth was Rutherford doing ?vacationing? in a war zone in the first place? And what costs were involved over those years in trying to free this man from his own stupidity?

Even his own brother, upon news of the release, conceded that it wasn't exactly a brilliant move to head off to Taliban territory for a vacation. Duh!

This leads to a larger question which has bugged me for years: Where does personal responsibility enter the picture when people through their own recklessness and/or arrogance, get themselves into sticky situations?

Inevitably, calls out for the government or somebody else to save them.

We see this played out every winter, for example, when back country skiers, not content with established ? and safer ? trails, venture past marked barriers in search of more excitement and end up getting caught in an avalanche or some other disaster, inevitably resulting in demands for rescue teams to risk their own lives and get in there and save them.

We also see it in the summer when various outdoors adventurers wonder off the beaten paths and head into the unknown, only to find themselves in trouble. Here again, rescue personnel are expected to rush in and save them from their own wanton stupidity. It's likely not possible to tally up how much money taxpayers ultimately end up shelling out for rescuing people from situations they put themselves into.

Perhaps that's something Rutherford himself could look at upon his return, since he was working as an auditor in Toronto before a brain cramp took him to Afghanistan for a scenic tour of an ongoing war zone.

Clearly, when people get themselves into these situations, we can't simply turn our backs on them and leave them to either die or languish forever in their self-made prison.

But it seems to me that we can at the very least send them a bill for at least part of the cost of saving them.

It is true that people accidentally do stupid things and get themselves into trouble. Who among us hasn't done something that upon reflection we wouldn't have done?

But we're talking about pre-planned stupidity here. Rutherford didn't just happen to end up in Afghanistan and make himself a target of the Taliban. Nor do those self-described adventurers who knowingly ignore warning signs before heading off into dangerous mountains and or forest regions and end up in a must-rescue situation.

Rutherford's brother Brian told The Canadian Press that news of the release was ?incredible news. It absolutely is enormous relief. My deepest gratitude to all those whose efforts have aided Colin's safe release.?

Fair enough. But perhaps a cheque to help cover the cost would show real gratitude and just might discourage other adventurers from making asses of themselves at public expense.

