

Caledon Citizen

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Afghanistan: Canada's 'Mission Impossible?'

As more and more bodies of our soldiers are returned from the battlefields, Canadians are about evenly divided when asked whether our mission in Afghanistan should be abandoned.

There's little doubt as to where some of our politicians stand on the issue. In particular, Prime Minister Stephen Harper stands committed to maintaining the mission until at least February, 2009, while NDP Leader Jack Layton wants the troops out by next February.

In all likelihood, the issue will dominate question periods in the House of Commons when it reconvenes, and there seems little doubt that it will figure prominently in the Liberal leadership race, where frontrunner Michael Ignatieff says we should be staying the course while others, including Bob Rae, advocate more emphasis being placed on economic aid and less on military offensives.

There's certainly no doubt that the role Canada has been playing has changed in recent months. Initially, our troops were posted near the capital, Kabul, where most of the time was spent in an ordinary policing role, maintaining law and order and the main risk was from suicide bombers.

Now based in the Taliban-dominated Kandahar region in southwest Afghanistan, the soldiers are instead engaged in open warfare against an enemy that seems to blend in with the local populace where they apparently enjoy widespread support.

It would seem there's little doubt that Canada's reputation as an independent country whose soldiers specialize in peacekeeping is already suffering and may be damaged beyond repair.

In the circumstances, it will be interesting, indeed, to see whether the federal government will stick to the present course or try to create at least the impression of a change in course.

There's little doubt that unless the cur-

rent offensive, dubbed Operation Medusa, succeeds in routing the Taliban, Afghanistan will be the major roadblock Mr. Harper will face in his bid to set the stage for an election that would give the Conservatives a majority of Commons seats.

As matters stand, opposition to the Afghan mission is strongest in Quebec, and this is one area where the Bloc Québécois and NDP are in full agreement. Were an election to be called this fall, the Conservatives would be hard-pressed to hold on to the 10 Quebec seats they now have, let alone gain enough seats in Quebec and Ontario to form a majority.

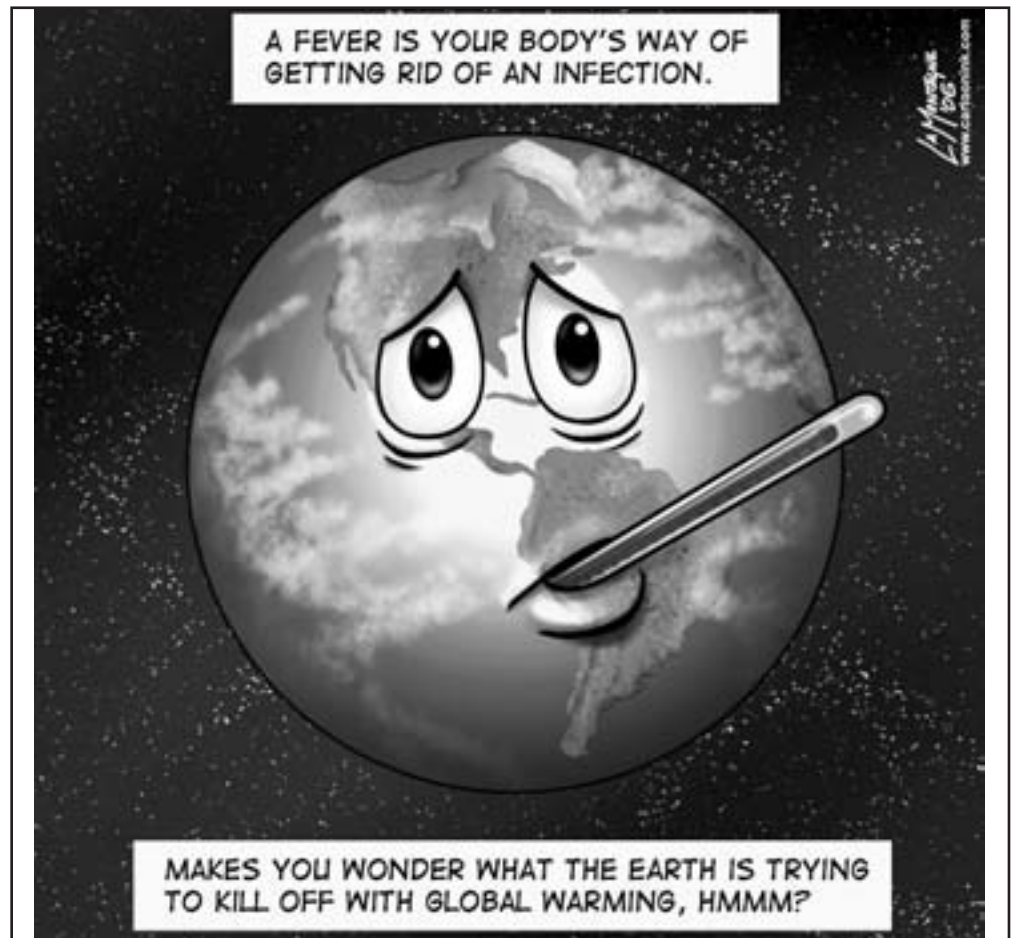
One of the many problems the government faces is the lack of awareness of what the Afghan people really think about what's going on. We've certainly not seen any opinion polls or other evidence that would support a view that our troops are regarded any differently than U.S. troops in Iraq, where they are viewed with great suspicion and distrust.

Perhaps what's really needed is a combination of massive humanitarian aid and a "propaganda war" aimed at dramatically improving our image.

It would also help if we were to see a lot more presence of Afghan soldiers in the front lines of any future offensives. Although they might already be there, we've seen precious little reference to their roles, media reports typically mentioning that the Canadians were accompanied by "British, Dutch and Afghan forces."

Although Jack Layton's call for negotiations with the Taliban has been the subject of universal derision, it was interesting to see reports of talks between Taliban leaders and Afghan warlords, and we suspect that, as is usually the case, the Taliban has a political wing that might one day be interested in power sharing arrangements.

Where is Solomon when we need him?



Our Readers Write

Generosity helped send kids to camp

As a student working at Caledon Community Services (CCS) for the summer, I have been able to learn a great deal about our community.

CCS just finished their summer "Kidz to Kamp," which gives under-privileged children the chance to go to camp, all expenses paid. During the summer, we were flooded

with support from the community, and in the end, we were able to send 88 children to camp, raising more than \$22,000. For this, we give our supporters the greatest gratitude.

I stayed out of the limelight for the greater part of the fund-raiser, but near the end, I was fortunate to visit one of the children we were sending to camp. His name was Raymond, a rambunctious, active child who lives in a small apartment with his mother and grandmother. It was obvious that his mother, a single parent trying to balance a full-time job with caring for her family, needed a break.

I will always remember the look on Raymond's face when he realized he was going to camp. He couldn't sit still as he chattered on about all the adventures he was about to have and all the other kids he was about to meet. It was clear that being cooped up in that tiny apartment without anyone his own age to talk to was taking a toll on him.

Thanks to your wonderful support, Raymond and the other 87 children were able to have the best summer possible.

By giving back to the community, you not only feel good, you make others feel good as well. And that is the greatest gift of all.

Ainsley Matthews

Summer Student

Caledon Community Services

Open house popular

Recently, Peace Ranch held its annual open house. As the clouds cleared, many friends, neighbours, relatives and agency representatives joined us in a barbeque and also enjoyed the opportunity to taste and purchase the variety of preserves prepared by our volunteers, staff and residents with some of the produce from our large vegetable garden.

Children enjoyed horseback riding, the petting zoo and Rosie, our pot-bellied pig. Many people took advantage of a wagon ride through the 24-acre farm to see our potato project and our many animals, which are used extensively in the pet therapy program.

We were delighted that Diana Fishleigh Eaton, the inspiration and founder of Peace Ranch, could attend and draw for the raffle. Winners were:

P. Stuckless, Woodbridge, 1st prize; F. Cooper, Caledon East, 2nd prize; N. Rampersaui, Mississauga, 3rd prize; J. Taplin, Caledon, 4th prize; S. Norling, Orangeville, 5th prize; P. Holland, Caledon, 6th prize.

Peace Ranch sincerely thanks the following for their support of this event - artist Cory Trepanier; the Old Downtown Gallery, Orangeville; Hockley Valley Resort; Brian Prill and Judi Weir for their raffle donation. Also to the volunteers and staff who made the afternoon such a success.

Margot Scott

Past-President

Peace Ranch

Questions on BAR

1. When were the residents on Coleraine Drive first informed that the Bolton bypass would likely affect their properties?

2. What specific conditions have changed between now and the early 1990s when the Citizens Liaison Committee made its recommendations to the Town to implement the then called bypass, now Bolton Arterial Roads System?

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Caledon Citizen



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