

Mission IS accomplishing the goals

For NDP Leader Jack Layton, Canada's heroic efforts against the maniacal Taliban zealots in Afghanistan is "the wrong mission. It's not working: it's not going to accomplish the goals."

Layton - like a majority of Canadians if you believe the polls - wants to cut and run and leave the Afghani people to the ravages of the Taliban. Quite apart from insulting our brave Canadian men and women - and making a mockery out of their considerable sacrifices (after all, if it's the "wrong" mission, what does that say about all those Canadians who volunteered to fight) - Layton has his facts wrong.

It is working. It is accomplishing the goals.

The problem is, while Layton is in a position to know what is happening on the ground there, your average Canadian isn't. Why? Because the media ignores the positive news that's why. Day after day we get fed the stories of the tragedies - the deaths and injuries of our soldiers. Even there, by the way, while each casualty is a terrible thing, compared to most wars the death and injury count is quite small.

But the real point here is that despite what Layton and other weak-kneed critics claim, the Canadian and other NATO forces are definitely making a difference in Afghanistan.

Just last month, for example, NATO released a report on the "reconstruction and development" in Afghanistan.

Here are a few of the highlights, most of which received little if any coverage in the major media.

Under the category of health, NATO reports that 83 percent of the population now has access to medical facilities, compared to nine percent under the Taliban; 76 percent of children under the age of five have been immunized against childhood diseases; more than 4,000 medical facilities opened since 2004; and over 600 midwives have been trained and deployed in every province of Afghanistan.

And Layton says it isn't working.

In the economy, while there are still obvious problems, the GDP is growing between 12 and 14 percent this year, government revenues jumped about 25 percent and per capita income, while still puny by western standards, doubled to \$355 compared to \$180 three years ago.

And Layton says it isn't working.

Under the Taliban, of course, girls and women were treated abysmally. Girls couldn't go to school. Women couldn't work outside the home. But now, thanks to our military intervention, over a quarter of parliamentarians are women (which beats our own record), millions of girls are back in school (there are 400,000 girls starting school for the first time this year) and over 100,000 women have taken advantage of NATO-supplied micro finance loans to set up their own businesses.

And Layton, whose party claims to be a champion for women, says it isn't working.

Under the Taliban, the country had one tightly-controlled university. Now there are 10. Under the Taliban, the government controlled all media, now there are seven national tv stations (six of them private), numerous radio networks and a rapidly growing number of newspapers and magazines.

And Layton says it isn't working.

In addition to those accomplishments, thousands of major infrastructure programs have been developed, and the country has attracted some of the world's major industries - along with the jobs they offer - such as Coca Cola, Siemens, Nestle and Etisalat.

Among the numerous projects, the Kajaki Dam will provide power to 1.7 million people, irrigation to thousands of farmers and thousands of jobs within the next three years.

And so it goes. It IS working. It IS helping the beleaguered people of Afghanistan get back on their collective feet and enjoy benefits of life which were out of the question when the murderous Taliban held sway.

What isn't working, however, is the constant bleating from Layton and his fellow travelers, the consistent downplaying of our accomplishments, which only serves to encourage the bad guys and discourage those who are on the ground in Afghanistan, both military and civilian personnel.

In his wanton quest for easy votes, Layton has decided to completely ignore the benefits of the mission - not to mention Canada's responsibility to NATO and the United Nations - and exploit the fact that Canadians, like anybody else, don't like reading about funerals and body counts.

He says he supports the troops then publicly rails about them being on a failed mission. Some support.

Rather than diminishing their sacrifices, Layton and his ilk would be better advised to thank them and be honest enough to acknowledge their impressive achievements in the face of a brutal enemy.



National Affairs

Claire Hoy

Detrimental house price trend

"By 2026 only three out of 10 of today's 10-year-olds will be able to afford to buy a home when they have families of their own if we stick to current building rates."

British government's summary response to the Barker Review

I suppose the sentiment, our children are our future, is in serious peril if house price trends continue on their merry, unchecked way.

The latest house price figures from across Canada apparently didn't surprise anyone. From a high of well over \$700,000 in Vancouver to a low of \$142,000 in New Brunswick, there is much disparity in this great land of ours. In the GTA, the average hovers around the \$400,000 mark, but aware people like you and I know this figure is still misleading, particularly here in Caledon. And, real estate professionals have upped the search parameters to include homes in the \$2 million range (now considered more commonplace).

Most 4-bedroom homes in Bolton will run you between \$400,000 and \$500,000, roughly 8 times what they were 30 years ago. Just think, in 1982 (25 years ago) you would buy a brand new subdivision home in

MMP democratic

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almost every Ontario voter genuine influence in who forms government. That is a lot more than can be said for our current system, which effectively ignores half the ballots that we cast in elections now.

The Citizens' Assembly was fully aware that party list members would be nominated by the government. They also knew that any temptation to select list members in back rooms would wither under public scrutiny, which is why they force parties to disclose their list selection processes transparently. Political parties in other countries that use MMP don't select their list members in "back rooms;" it won't happen in Ontario either.

Even as he criticizes the number of politicians that would be elected under MMP (a whopping 129!), Hoy would have us adopt a two-round voting system, which requires us to run two elections, polarizes the electorate, and is by far the most expensive voting system the OCA considered.

Hoy makes one good point: we do need a lot more public education around our voting system. Learning more about the two voting systems up for consideration this October is a great way to start.

Paul Nijjar
Kitchener



Mark Pavilons

Caledon Village for \$90,000.

In the last 15 years alone, car prices have risen roughly 60% and inflation-adjusted hourly wages have gone up only 10 cents since 1991. Will wages double in the next 15 years? (Yes that was a rhetorical question, unless of course you're a civil servant.)

People think that as house prices rise (and they have consistently for years) the better off we all are. What you have is the same people, earning the same money, living in overpriced homes that cost more and more to maintain on a regular basis. We are literally drowning in our own material excess.

We're also (mistakenly perhaps) firm believers that our houses are vaults for

value - a veritable recession-proof bar of gold that represents our personal wealth (or debt considering few homes are paid off).

Real estate agents talk about "curb appeal, staging" and investing a few bucks to spruce the place up for potential buyers. It's like kicking the tires of a used car on a lot, not making one of the biggest decisions of your life. Houses are commodities, like pig's feet and soy beans. While we dress them up with hardwood and imported granite, the reality is they're structures that lack both warmth and sentiment in today's out-of-control market.

Things are not likely to improve, but skyrocket to unforeseen heights.

A CIBC World Markets study predicts house prices will double by 2026. Imagine those same subdivision homes in Bolton hitting the \$1 million mark when our kids are in the market. Will you have the extra cash to lend them for the down payment? The study based its predictions on demographics, low interest rates, constant immigration and "new mortgage products" that will make homes more accessible.

Don't you love bank-

speak? There was a time when banks wouldn't lend you money if you didn't have sufficient savings, a very good job and collateral. Today, there are all sorts of "mortgage products" and fancy number-crunching that will allow anyone to get in over their heads, with the blessing of your friendly, neighborhood mortgage lender.

The fact of the matter is, Canadians (people all over) tend to spend more than they earn. Twenty years ago, workers typically saved roughly 20% of their take-home pay. Guess what that amount is today? A big, fat zero. People are even cashing in their nest eggs - pensions, insurance policies, etc. North Americans are being crushed under the weight of massive debt - mortgages, car payments and credit card charges. These figures are almost as impressive as house prices! In all, Canadians owe \$750 billion in personal debt.

All of this saddens me, in many respects. I am sad on pay day - a typically joyous day of the work week. I'm sad because the money I earn doesn't belong to me - it's gone literally before I can cash my cheque.

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THAT WASN'T HARD

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