



WELCOME TO AFGHANISTAN, STÉPHANE DION

January 12, 2008



More than a year after becoming Liberal leader, Stéphane Dion has finally found Afghanistan on the map.

And once he's done explaining to the Afghan people why, before actually stepping foot in their country, he dismissed Canadian efforts to help bring stability and democracy to their lives, Dion should set aside partisan self-interest for a moment and open his eyes to the progress that's being made on the ground.

Never one to let facts get in the way of a political opportunity, Dion offended Canadians and Afghans, alike, last week – insisting that Canada should immediately notify NATO it will abandon its mission in Afghanistan, and arguing it would be a “travesty” if the mission continued beyond February, 2009.

The real travesty is Dion's chronic rush to judgment in pursuit of partisan goals.

He did it in vowing to defeat the Government's last Budget long before he read it. He did it in rejecting the Government's Speech from the Throne long before he heard it.

And he's done it repeatedly in criticizing Canada's role in Afghanistan, long before ever bothering to visit our troops and development workers, or considering the positive changes they are making.

Because of the efforts and sacrifices of brave Canadian men and women, the people of Afghanistan have seen the institution of democratic elections, the stirring of human rights and freedoms for women, the construction of schools, healthcare facilities and the basic infrastructure of a functional economy.

While he's in Afghanistan, the Liberal leader might want to explore the Aschiana School in Kabul, where Canada is partnering to ensure that children who, because of war, tragedy and chaos, were left out of the school system, are now getting an education.

He might want to speak to Canadians who are assisting with vaccination programs, reaching nearly

200,000 children and women in this country. Or with those who are working with Afghans on more than 27,000 reconstruction projects now underway, including clean water, sanitation and electrical power.

Or he might want to listen to some of Canada's esteemed men and women in uniform, who are creating the kind of stability and peace that make all of this possible.

And he may want to ask Afghans and aid workers if such progress would have been possible without the security operation?

Prime Minister Harper has appointed former Liberal Deputy Prime Minister John Manley to lead a panel of eminent Canadians who will, in the coming weeks, make informed recommendations to the Government on Canada's path forward in Afghanistan.

By subverting that critical process in pursuit of political gain, Stéphane Dion not only diminishes the hope of Afghans but the dedication and sacrifice of Canada's finest.