

**General Rick Hillier
Chief of the Defence Staff
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Well, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Mesdames et messieurs, c'est un plaisir vraiment pour moi d'être ici parmi vous ce matin en présence d'hommes et de femmes en uniforme des éléments terrestres, aériens, et maritimes, les forces régulières et de réserve, les anciens combattants, vétérans, civils et tous, ceux qui nous supportent, qui servent si bien leur pays et qui pour la première fois depuis la deuxième guerre mondiale à mon avis reçoivent finalement toute l'attention et la reconnaissance dont ils méritent pleinement pour leur dévouement au service de notre grand pays, le meilleur pays du monde.

C'est aussi pour moi un privilège d'être ici avec les conjoints et les conjointes, nos familles pour le service qu'elles et ils rendent de façon différente mais admirable au service du Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here this morning and have the opportunity to speak to you about the Canadian Forces, what we do for our country, our men and women in uniform. I have but one goal and that is to use all the allocated time so nobody can ask me tough questions at the end of this but it is a pleasure to be here.

Normally when I show up, I'm here with my Maple Leafs Folder. You can see that is not the case today. It's old, tattered and fell apart, much like the team. (Laughter.) I do use a recruiting folder, always in recruiting mode but not specifically this morning although I did notice that over this last little while Lew MacKenzie has had the first haircut that he had since he retired. (Laughter.) And so perhaps if he wishes to reapply, we would consider bringing him back to the Canadian Forces. (Laughter.)

But it is good to be here with so many great men and women in uniform, lots of them around here - air, land and sea, regular and reserve, retired, civilians, those who are simply supporters - and to be amongst those who serve their country so well and who for the first time I believe in this country really since World War II are starting to receive the appreciation that goes with the recognition of their courage, their dedication, their loyalty, their commitment and their value to this great country - in the view of this unashamedly, unabashedly patriotic Canadian, the very best country in the world. And I know that every man and woman in uniform would agree with me and I believe that Canadians also would.

But let me also say that it is a privilege to be here with some of our families this morning too, a couple of whom I'll introduce to you a little later on of equal greatness to our servicemen and women and to be able to thank them for their service, the service they give us in a very different way, a different manner to our country and to thank them for the burdens that they carry so, so well in such a dignified manner.

This last year has truly been the year of the family. And in fact I said at this conference last year, the Canadian Defence Association, my third speaking engagement I believe at the time, this being my fourth, that this whole family approach would be our focus for the 12 months leading to where we are now.

But even I did not anticipate the incredible surge of appreciation for those who support those who serve. The establishment of the Military Family Fund. The first CDS Gala Ball in support of families and the enormous support over the following months by individual Canadians and businesses and corporations with so many initiatives triggered by others has in itself changed the dynamic of who those military families are and what they need and what they see themselves doing.

We know these are fundamental truths that if the family breaks that sailor, that soldier, that airman or air woman will break just as surely as if shot by the enemy. And we want to ensure that the support is there to prevent that from occurring and then to enable healthy and happy family relationships over the long term of a career. Our attitudes had to change, that part was obvious, from one of - and this was our attitude - if we had wanted you to have a wife, we would have issued you one. And that sort of coloured everything we did as we dealt with our families. It had to change to one of knowing the importance of those families both to us as individuals obviously but also to us as the Canadian Forces, to this institution.

As the Chief of Air Staff, Lieutenant-General Angus Watt says, we recruit airmen and air women but we retain families. What a great change to be in front of at this point in time when so much positive action is taking place.

And it is a good time to be in the Canadian Forces - air, land or sea, it doesn't matter, regular or reserve. Make no mistake about it: we're working hard. Rare is the appointment or the job in any unit or any location across Canada or the world where the demands are not intense and the hours required to get even the most basic things done are not horrendous.

But we're going to suck it up and we're going to do it. We worked equally hard back in the mid and late '90s and we worked those hard hours back then and the difficult task to accomplish the downsizing and the closing and the disposing and the cancelling and the farewelling of people, equipment and infrastructure. And now our job is so much more positive inside such a greater, more positive context.

It is a time when we are growing. We have attracted, we recruited, we've enrolled, we've trained and educated and continue to train and educate some 21,000 young Canadians over the past three years just in the regular force alone to grow the Canadian Forces. From below 62,000, just over 61,000 just over three years ago to this month crossing the threshold of 66,000 full-time men and women in uniform serving Canada. On our way up still.

We are attracting people from coast to coast to coast, from every province and territory and from every demographic although not nearly enough from the minority communities yet.

Que ce soit dans les éléments aériens, terrestres ou maritimes être dans les Forces canadiennes de nos jours est très valorisant. Nous sommes dans une époque de croissance. Nous avons attiré et recruté, enrôlé et commencé l'entraînement de plus de 21 000 jeunes Canadiens et Canadiennes dans la force régulière au cours des trois dernières années ce qui nous a permis d'accroître les effectifs de 61 000 à plus de 66 000 ce mois. Et nous sommes toujours en croissance.

Nous attirons les gens de tous les coins de notre pays, de tous les provinces et territoires et de tous les gendres mais pas encore assez au niveau des communautés visibles. Nous avons rencontré tous nos objectifs de recrutement et allons le maintenir encore cette année. Les Forces canadiennes attirent maintenant les Canadiens et Canadiennes comme nous l'avons jamais fait dans le passé.

The great challenge that we have now and that of the navy and the air force and the army commanders with my direction and support is to turn all of those civilians that we're taking in and to train in effective service men and women and to reduce the training list that we run at close to 10,000 right to much less than that and to continue to work hard at the same time to retain the larger-than-normal percentage of people in the CF who are pensionable and who therefore have more options to consider. And we'll be successful with your help.

We're getting to young Canadians. Eighty percent of the kids that we're getting, of the Canadians that we're enrolling are in the age group that we really do want, in that 18 to 29-year-old group. We saw some surveys that said that 17 percent of Canadians in that age group across our country want to join us. We also get slightly more mature individuals and as long as they can do the job we're happy to have them. It does concern us when the survey says that about 22 percent of those who are 55 years of age and older also want to join the Canadian Forces. (Laughter.) That's not quite the age group that we have specifically targeted.

While we grow the number of people, regular and reserve, we truly are transforming every part of our business. I know that's a word that's much misused at times but we really are making revolutionary change be it in the recruiting process itself and you heard me say a year or so ago that we had set some goals in our recruiting process, that 30 percent of those people who showed up at our recruiting centres we wanted enrolled in a week, 20 percent in a week, 30 percent more within a month and the remainder after that. We've not quite met those goals but we're darn close to it and we'll continue to work towards it so that when kids show up with lots of options, with everybody looking for them, you in corporations, in business, you in universities or us or other parts of the Government of Canada, we are going to be their first choice and we are going to respond quickly.

We're changing that. We're changing the training and how we deliver it and the education and how we deliver it. And things that Andy Leslie is doing in the army right now, Angus Watt in the air force and Drew Robertson in the navy are absolutely revolutionary in their nature. And our use of civilian infrastructure, our use of educational institutes and on and on and on. Every part of our program is changing.

We are reequipping. You've heard a lot about that over this last several days including this morning for Afghanistan and for everything else that we do. Fighting vehicles for the army including the Leopard II tank. UAVs, we do have UAVs here at the tactical level. We do have UAVs that can do part of the job for us and we do need more and we do need better ones and we're working hard at that one.

Personal equipment for our soldiers and sailors and airmen and air women. Communications, strategic lift, tactical lift, artillery, helicopters both maritime and heavy lift helicopters. Trucks. It doesn't sound very sexy but Canadian Forces cannot do their job without that logistics lift capability and trucks that can go into high risk areas to deliver the needed commodities where the risk is extreme, where people are trying to prevent them moving. Our joint support ships and of course the Arctic and offshore patrol ships.

And while reequipping we are also dramatically, in fact revolutionarily, changing the acquisition process. Faster is always better.

And while we do all of that, we are also upgrading our major systems to keep those that are appropriate world class. We don't want to be experts in the maintenance of ancient equipment. We've been there. We've done that. We don't want to be recognized around the world for that. The appropriate fleets though like our frigates, getting the submarines at that level, the F-18s and the LAV-III's and on and on and on we also are working to upgrading those.

And that all is a lot of work. That and many other things aside, you know, two years ago Bruce McLean who was the commander in the navy at the time who was in my office, he and I had a conversation about the challenges in doing all of this and as he said then, "Chief, it's going to be tough, a lot of work. But this is something we've been waiting for all of our lives and we need to get on with it and suck it up and do it." And of course Bruce McLean retired two weeks after making that comment. (Laughter.) But I repeat it frequently for my own benefit on some of those long days that we have.

On the equipping side I was in Trenton just last side Wednesday. I had the opportunity to jump in one of our new C-17s, actually C-17 number two, for a short trip with a crew that were in train-up and doing touch and goes and short circuits and coming into intense air space, high traffic air space to get some experience on it. I will say when I got on the aircraft because of just a crew and myself with my small team I did feel a little bit conspicuous about strapping my briefcase down in a cargo compartment that's about the size of this room. And I'm just overwhelmed with the capability that this aircraft gives us. And it is working and it is working flat out. And we're bringing crews into

operational readiness. We'll take delivery very soon of aircraft number three and number four and this changes in a fundamental way how we can do business.

And I'll interject here and say I just want to pass my thanks in this public forum to General Buzz Mosley, the Chief of Air Staff in the United States, in the United States Air Force for the assistance that he and his men and women have given us in bringing into operations the C-17 and I know will give us to bring into operations the C-130J. We could not do our job, get those aircraft in service, certainly do it as quickly as we've done it and deliver the product on the ground if you will without the help that they gave us. And when I jumped on that aircraft, there was a lanky major there from the U.S. Air Force, Major Aaron Minders, who was taking our new, just-out-of-the-pipeline young pilots and passing on all his experience and expertise and confidence on how you fly that aircraft to the maximum level possible and give us the service that we want. To the United States Air Force, thank you for what you're doing on that one. (Applause.)

And there's always criticism out there about our reequipping. Not all agree with it. There are those who say that we have enough. I don't know where they've been when they compare that to the jobs that we are doing. Those who might spurn the purchase of things like helicopters or those who would deride tanks and those who would do the latter have by and large not been the ones sitting in them when the explosion takes place or when the ambush is triggered or when the live fire starts coming in and you depend upon that vehicle with its armour protection and its fire power and its mobility to save your life, to save the lives of your buddies and to accomplish the mission that this country has given you to do when unconstrained extremists are trying to kill you.

We in my view have just started the reequipping and the only thing that surprises me about it is that Canadian moms and dads put up for so long with their sons and daughters being so ill-equipped for what our nation has asked them to do. We're changing that process right now.

Our great focus remains, however, our operations, conducting them in such a manner as to give Canadians comfort that when they need us, we deliver - at home where we live and work, around the continent and across the world. Comfort that we'll do the job in a way to make them proud and in such fine fashion that Canada and Canadians will reap the strategic benefits and that just as at Vimy 90 years ago, almost 91 years ago now, people will remember what we did and why and the positive effect on our country and the world.

Job one at home involves some 10,000 people at any point in time and immediate reaction units from the army across the country, on maritime patrols from the navy, sovereignty patrols - land, air and sea - across the North, aerospace control as part of NORAD - 50th anniversary coming up in May of an organization that works well - some of those patrols with F-18s based in Alaska to effectively use both nations' capabilities to do the job, work with police force and civilian authorities in many areas including planning for events like Olympic 2010 and the face that Canadians see during their very worst days, those from our search and rescue units. Canadians in those units on a

daily basis demonstrate the most incredible courage in the face of enormous danger to rescue their fellow Canadians from life-threatening events. Sometimes they've put themselves in those locations and life-threatening circumstances because of stupidity. Other times it's because of the job, because of life, because of some bad luck.

One of those search and rescue technicians I'd like to introduce you to this morning is Sergeant Brian Decaire. Sergeant Decaire, would you stand up? Actually, would you come up here? And if you don't mind, would you ask your wife to come with you, please? Ladies and gentlemen, I'd just like to have you recognize when I talk about him in a sec here -- (applause).

You know, ladies and gentlemen, Sergeant Brian Decaire, this is his wife, Liz Potter. He's of Winnipeg. He's 30 years old. He's a search and rescue technician, team leader with 435 Squadron in Winnipeg. He served with great distinction, first of all, in the 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. And for his calm and courageous actions while wounded at Tarnak Farms in Kandahar in 2002, he was awarded a mention in Dispatches. As a search and rescue technician, he continues to shine. In April 2005, along with Sergeant Darcy St. Laurent, he parachuted from a C-130 Hercules aircraft during a blizzard - and this was a significant storm - to assist a downed helicopter pilot in the Northwest Territories. In total darkness, buffeted by enormously high winds, they trudged for an hour carrying some 30 kilograms of survival gear each to reach the stranded pilot. The weather conditions were so severe that they and the victim waited out the storm for over five days until they could finally be extracted by helicopter. For their actions in various hazardous circumstances, they were awarded the Medal of Bravery by Her Excellency the Governor General and Brian was promoted to sergeant last Friday. What an incredible Canadian, ladies and gentlemen.

And could I ask you to recognize the great lady standing to his right and to thank her for her support and her service to us and to her country and for her motivation for Brian to go and do his job and to come home alive. Liz, thank you. (Applause.)

I did mention the planning work for Olympics 2010. We are well advanced in that planning in conjunction with the many other agencies that are engaged. We certainly are not the lead role but we will be in support and do what we must do. We have established a Joint Task Force Games. We are really at the last stage of finalizing the specific tasks for air, land, sea and special forces. And throughout it all we are validating the command structure that has given us one commander supported and enabled by a small but appropriate staff who is focussed on readying us to conduct operations at home here in Canada. And without Canada Command and without that commander and small but appropriate staff, I would not have the confidence that we would be ready for that mission and the many others that are either predicted or will explode upon us.

We continue to conduct operations outside of Canada with NATO, for example, including with the Standing Maritime Group as it deploys. HMCS Toronto was deployed over this past year and did circumnavigation of Africa, participated in operations during

that circumnavigation including high risk boardings and searches in the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

And one of the sailors who was on that ship is here this morning and I'd also like to introduce him to you and his eight-year-old daughter Anna. Petty Officer Second Class Bill Brown. Bill, would you come up here and just stand up? Let me just talk to you for a second, if you don't mind, please. (Applause.)

Okay, I've got to tell you Bill is from Newfoundland, right. (Laughter.) And he mentioned to me this morning he forgot to bring the bottle of Moose that he had for me because he's not allowed to bring to the Chief of Defence Staff a bottle of poached moose which perhaps somebody might have had access to in Newfoundland. These things do occur still. Incredible young man, 35 years old. Senior naval electronics sonar technician with HMCS Toronto. He just returned from the deployment as the second in command of the Toronto's boarding party. And in a high risk 48-hour boarding of a vessel in the eastern Mediterranean in October of this past fall he maintained superb team cohesion, vigilance and focus while faced with unknown threats, deplorable sanitation and extreme bad weather. His impeccable leadership during this boarding ensured the acquisition of significant intelligence and he was awarded the SEFCOM commander's commendation for his work and for his leadership. He's with Anna, his eight-year-old daughter. And I just want to say to both of you thank you for what you do for our country. And, Anna, your father is a courageous, a brave leader and a brave man and we're very proud of him and we're very proud that you're here with us today. And Anna is missing a couple of days of school but I'm going to write a note to her teacher and ask that that's okay. (Laughter and applause.) Bill, thank you. Anna, thank you. (Applause.)

Outside of our country I don't think that there's a single Canadian - I did watch Jay Leno's Jaywalk last night and he was interviewing three folks so this might not be true - a single Canadian who is unaware of our major focus on Afghanistan and unaware of the challenges that we face there or indeed unaware of the issues that Afghans with the support of the international community must resolve.

We in the Canadian Forces during our mission there have learned and relearned many lessons in this past several years and obviously, particularly during the portion of the mission in Kandahar itself. We did much of our force restructuring, for example, and our cuts throughout this past decade or so based on the fact that what we would bring on any mission like this what we could and that our allies would provide the rest, the missing tactical pieces. And we discovered and we have discovered that this is a dangerous error and that has led to a significant reassessment of our forces, what kind of units are going to be effective and what they will need to be effective and how we are going to provide that and support them on these operations.

The one thing that looms large from all of those lessons brought home every time we use urgent acquisitions to rectify faults or deficiencies or fill a void is that stable funding to provide that intelligent and coherent program development over the longer term is essential. The problems of parts and repairs and maintenance and training and use are

all greater when we buy and deliver directly from the factory to the battlefield rather than well-run, funded and coherently put together programs that can deliver a package operational capability.

One of the things we have validated, however, is the commitment and the capability of our men and women who wear the nation's uniform and this is a fact. This is the face of Canada that Afghans will remember. Their effect, be it keeping the Taliban on its back foot, providing the framework and training for both the Afghan Army and Afghan Police, enabling local construction on roads, causeways, bridges, schools or supporting the development of basic governance procedures, such as we do with the strategic advisory team in Kabul, Canadians, men and women do it all, do it all professionally and do it well and they do it with compassion and pride and with great effect.

I read a commander's SITREP this morning which talked about the two medical outreach clinics in Zari and Panjwaii districts this past week. Two Canadian Forces medical teams go out, the first outreach team in 24 hours, saw 676 Afghan locals patients. Three hundred and twenty-five of them were females came out to be treated. The second team in little less than a day saw 466 local Afghans with about the same percentage and for many of those it's the first time they've had the opportunity to receive direct medical care and they hold Canadian doctors and nurses and medical practitioners and physicians' assistants in the highest esteem and their expectations were pretty high and I think they were in fact met.

They understand in Kandahar, our men and women who've been there, who are there now and who will go, that without security you cannot have development. You certainly can't have the kind of outreach clinics that we just talked about. And without the development you will not have sustainable security. The two go hand in hand. And they also understand, those men and women in uniform, although they certainly do not relish it, that the approach to knocking the Taliban off balance is the only way that we can provide any kind of security for that development to occur. They don't relish that job but they know that it is necessary and to get on and do it.

Our commanders and our service men and women on the ground know what has to be done and they know how to do it and the key to our success to date has been empowering them in that mission.

And one of those committed and courageous people, one of our national treasures truly that have become our national credentials is Sergeant Abdul Guindo. Sergeant Guindo, are you here? Would you stand up, please, and come up here? And if you would bring your aunt with you, Yannick Raymond, also, I would appreciate that. I'd just like to introduce this individual to you, who has served in Afghanistan, who represents if you will almost two components of our Canadian Forces, the regulars and the reserves. Sergeant Guindo is from Quebec City. (Applause.)

Sergeant Guindo is from Quebec City. He's a reserve infantry soldier with the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. He served twice in Bosnia so two missions for his country and

helped Ottawa region throughout the 1998 ice storm. He was under my command when I was a brigade commander in Petawawa, rolled in here at three o'clock in the morning and to give you the idea of the level of -- this is the tenth anniversary of the ice storm, right, just the last month here. And to give you an idea of the planning capability we have, we spent the first half hour on the ground trying to find Ottawa-Carleton Regional Headquarters. That was the level of our ability. (Laughter.)

Sergeant Guindo was under my command during that ice storm and it was a great pleasure indeed, Sergeant. And he just returned from a seven-month mission to Afghanistan this past March. From Kandahar, Abdul served as a combat logistics patrol commander with the force protection platoon of the national support element. And he led his troops through numerous ambushes and improvised explosive device strikes. He demonstrated excellent situational awareness and his inspiring leadership had a most positive impact on his troops and on the mission. And for his superior leadership, his willingness to face the risk and his devotion to duty, he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. He has saved lives - Canadian and Afghan - and he's I think been one of the greatest representatives we could ever ask for, a great Canadian. And he's here with his aunt Yannick Raymond today. And we just want to say thanks to both of you for what you do for our country and the burdens that you carry. God bless both of you. Thank you. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, your sailors, your airmen and air women and your soldiers don't ask much from us as they execute the missions for Canada and particularly the one in Afghanistan for Afghans, for Canadians, under the United Nations mandate as mentioned by Laurie Hawn and within a NATO construct. And as the debate here in Canada goes on they watch that with interest and they ask nothing from it. But they ask that the effect at the end of it be very clear. And they're vocal about that. And they from their moral high ground of being the ones who will accept the risk and the sacrifice with executing that mission they ask pretty simple things from us as a country. And since I'm their voice, I'll articulate.

They support completely, let me first say, the sole prerogative in this country as the prime minister has said that in Parliament the decision that decides the course of the nation will be taken. They spend their lives, they do their work in uniform to ensure in fact that that can occur. But they do ask, again, from the point of view of those who will accept the risk and the sacrifice of that mission that they be given clarity of purpose in what they are asked to do. And they get that clarity of purpose as soon as we can possibly give it to them as a country. Because we are in the eyes of the Taliban in a window of extreme vulnerability and the longer we go without that clarity with the issue in doubt, the more the Taliban will target us a perceived weak link.

I'm not going to stand here and tell you that the suicide bombings of this past week have been related to the debate back here in Canada but I also cannot stand here and say that they are not. And certainly there is a perception out there that the Taliban will try to take advantage of the debate back here and try to prevent a cohesive mission and will indeed attempt to attack our Canadian Forces in Kandahar.

They ask, these men and women, that they be given a mission that is militarily viable. Canada can select any mission it wants, tell us to do anything it wants but we've all been down the road before, anyone in this room who's served in uniform, is in uniform now, will remember the caveated nation that we were for which we now lambaste all the other countries.

UN battalions - and many of us who served in the former Yugoslavia will remember this - UN battalions were always abbreviated so it was RUSBAT or USBAT or BRITBAT or FRENCHBAT or CANBAT as the battalions. And when those battalions arrived on the ground they were quickly assessed by those around them as to their national willingness to do what was needed and often for Canadian battalions were consequently labeled not CANBAT but CANTBAT because of the controls and caveats imposed from back here in Canada, in a ridiculous manner constraining their ability to do anything except watch the ethnic cleansing that took place.

Giving us the ability to defend ourselves doesn't do it. If we want to defend ourselves, the best defence is simply to stay home because we will not achieve what our country would ask us to do. And over the past six months I'll simply tell you as an example our soldiers have removed from the battlefields six Taliban commanders who have been responsible for the planning and the leading and the implementation of attacks that caused the deaths of 21 of our soldiers. Without the proactive operations necessary to precisely track them, locate them and attack them, they with their forces would still be trying to kill us.

Lastly, and I'll ask this on their behalf, is that if our mission continues in Afghanistan, is it too much to ask our Parliament, representing all Canadians and in a democratic system once the troops are committed by our Parliament they're committed on behalf of all of us whether you agree with the mission or not, is it too much to ask on behalf of those soldiers that if we are committed into Afghanistan post of February '09 that they show their support for the men and women who will execute that mission by voting overwhelmingly to support them in the danger and the risk that they will encounter? I think that's the least our soldiers could expect as they could go out and lay their lives on the line for our country. (Applause.)

As always, we in uniform who execute any mission our country gives to us to the best of our abilities regardless of the risk to any of us we'll judge what mission we are given post-February '09 when we look into the eyes of the families who have lost their loved ones and hear them say that the loss, their sacrifice on a family has not been in vain.

Now I know I've been going on at length. Probably about half the noses of the organizations represented here in the room out of joint in one way or the other. So I'll finish this quickly as I can with just a few words about the incredible phenomenon sweeping our country, every part of our society, growing on a weekly basis of support for soldiers and sailors and airmen and air women and their families. We have seen support in ways and in areas not evident, as I said a little earlier, since World War II and

in some cases we've never seen this before in our country.

Care of our wounded is part of that overall support including a commitment to give them the opportunity to continue to serve and to emphasize that we can continue to do business as normal for their careers.

À Valcartier maintenant en même temps que je parle ici le soldat Dominique Larocque de Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Québec qui s'est enrôlé dans les Forces canadiennes en 2005 et qui a été blessé sévèrement l'automne passé en Afghanistan et qui a perdu son pied et une partie de sa jambe est en train d'être promu au caporal en reconnaissance de son service extraordinaire pour le Canada, les Forces canadiennes en Afghanistan. C'est une promotion bien méritée et j'aimerais lui dire félicitations et merci en même temps. Il est homme phénoménal certainement qui nous a représentés superbement pendant cette mission. On est très fier de lui, très fier qu'il s'est enrôlé dans les Forces canadiennes et très fier qu'il a fait son travail pour le Canada et pour nous.

This young man we're promoting to corporal, ladies and gentlemen, lost his foot, part of his leg in Afghanistan this past fall. He could not travel here so I could do the promotion in front of you today so we're promoting him right at this time in Valcartier in recognition of his service and we have a place in the Canadian Forces for that young man to continue to serve. What an incredible great Canadian. (Applause.)

The support that we've seen across the country has in many cases been very, very real. Sports teams treating service men and women like VIPs. I refer back to the Senators' appreciation game on 17 January, incredible Oilers' appreciation game on the 23rd of November. I was there with Laurie Hawn and our minister where we had 5,000 men and women and family members at the game and the evening was built around them. Great Leafs game, an appreciation game that took place and because we were there they won. That's a rarity so I refer to it. (Laughter.) The Allouettes, Calgary Flames, the Vancouver Canucks, the Toronto Marleys, the Toronto Raptors and, ladies and gentlemen, the Washington Capitals had a Canadian Forces appreciation game on the 17th of January to show their appreciation to our men and women in uniform and their families for what they do for Canada and for the world.

There are communities rallies to both farewell and welcome home men and women in uniform, donations to a variety of funds including the Military Family Fund to support children, service men and women and their families and a rallying around by communities of our families during the stress of deployments. The issue of great people doing great things or the list of great people doing great things to support us is endless.

I receive requests all the time as to what people can do, organizations can do or even governments can do at all levels to help out. And let me just tell you one of the greatest stresses of all is one that's difficult to resolve and it's not like the question I had two years ago when I was standing here and Ron Joyce came up and asked the question what could he do for the troops. I said well, you know, actually the troops would like a Tim Horton's in Kandahar and secondly they'd like one in Wainwright, Alberta. I think the Wainwright, Alberta one was more difficult to do at the training centre but both of

them are in operation doing what they want.

The greatest stressor that we have right now for our families and particularly when one of the family members deploys is a lack of family physicians for some 25 to 30 percent or more of our families, our military families who have been ordered to move to new locations by us to support operations and who, because they are new arrivals, simply cannot find that family doctor. And if you think it's tough enough as a young sailor doing your mission in the Persian Gulf boarding one ship after another, not knowing what you're going to find when you do it, in horrible conditions, in temperatures of 50 degrees plus, doing it while your wife is bouncing around urgent care clinics or emergency rooms with a sick child because she cannot find a family doctor becomes almost a show stopper for all concerned. And I challenge all of us across this country to take steps to change that for those people who have no choice but to move to the locations that we ask them to go to serve our country.

There are also easy options available to support folks for corporations and businesses because those families when they move to new locations give up their jobs and give up their careers. And if you want to go out and establish a preferential hiring list for the spouses of military men and women, that will be an incredible thing indeed to show that your actions actually mirror the words of support.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I will close by saying that speculation as to my endurance as the Chief of Defence Staff has gone on for a little while. Far too many questions asked of me including some when I really wasn't interested in asking -- or answering or responding to them. But I expect that this is probably my last Canadian Defence Association because I'm waiting for the offer from the Toronto Maple Leafs to put the general in general manager of the Leafs. (Laughter.) And I expect to get that offer soon and if I do, I'm gone. (Laughter.)

I thank you for your attention and I thank you for your support. I thank you for your enthusiasm and I thank you for the energy and the motivation that you give us to carry on when we ourselves are fatigued. Would you continue in your actions, in your thoughts, in your prayers if you believe in God, to remember the thousands of Canada's sons and daughters who are serving their country in harm's way right now and remember particularly the young families who also serve, albeit slightly differently.

God bless you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. I was unsuccessful in meeting my goal, not for the first time. I do have a couple of minutes and I would be delighted to take some questions if you have any. Please make them easy.