

CANADA

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2007

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THE RECORD A3

ACROSS CANADA

OTTAWA

Progress slowly being made in Afghanistan, MPs told

Progress in reconstructing Afghanistan has been slow, but people's lives are getting better, officials from NATO and the UN told MPs yesterday.

However, they also told the Commons defence committee that if NATO countries were to walk away from Afghanistan prematurely, the country would slide into civil war.

Christopher Alexander, a deputy special representative of the UN secretary general, said the health-care system, which was virtually non-existent under the Taliban, has been rebuilt, and four million refugees have returned to the country.

EDMONTON

Energy firms urged to build housing for workers

A growing number of Alberta cabinet ministers is calling on energy companies to build housing for their workers in the booming oilsands region.

Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Guy Boutilier says some firms provided housing when the first oilsands plants were being built three decades ago. But he says in recent years companies have been paying rental subsidies of up to \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month, which has inflated rents and done nothing to help with the dire housing shortage.

TORONTO

Liberals would perpetuate cities' portion of gas tax

A federal Liberal government would make permanent the current five-year deal that transfers a portion of the gas tax to municipalities, party leader Stéphane Dion said yesterday while stopping short of agreeing to fork over one cent of the GST to cities.

In an election-style speech to delegates attending a summit on Toronto's future, Dion pledged that, as prime minister, he would make research and development, immigration, public transit and the working poor a priority.

Dion suggested he wouldn't be able to honour such commitments if he agreed to a one-cent GST transfer.

OTTAWA

Charges stayed against pair who killed drug dealers

Charges have been stayed against two men in the execution-style slayings of a couple near Ottawa 17 years ago in one of the longest criminal trials in Canadian history.

Robert Stewart and Richard Malloy had been charged with first-degree murder in the January 1990 killings of drug dealers Michel Giroux, 24, and his common-law wife Manon Bourdeau, 27, in Cumberland, Ont.

Murder charges against Richard Trudel and James Sauve were stayed last month.

The trial and appeal process lasted more than 15 years, resulting in the decision by the Crown to stay the charges because of the length of time.

MONTREAL

Third-party leader slams two frontrunners

Old arguments over Quebec independence have mesmerized the two big fish in the provincial election campaign, says Mario Dumont, the third-party leader whose unexpected popularity is putting pressure on the two frontrunners.

Dumont, leader of the Action démocratique du Québec, slammed his Liberal and Parti Québécois rivals yesterday for fixating on referendum fall-out instead of proposing new ideas to improve Quebecers' lives.

The ADQ leader said the debate between Jean Charest and André Boisclair is taking place in their own private fishbowl and is producing nothing but bubbles.

MONTREAL

Councillor to challenge Trudeau for Liberal nod

A 55-year-old Montreal municipal councillor is going after the Liberal nomination in the same federal riding where Justin Trudeau is hoping to get the nod.

Mary Deros said she decided to run after defeated Liberal MP Pierre Pettigrew assured her at last fall's Liberal leadership convention he wouldn't be returning to politics.

MONCTON, N.B.

No cases of Tasers killing people, expert says

A bioelectricity expert has told an inquest into the death of a man who had been Tasered by police that there are almost no recorded cases of Tasers killing people.

In each case, J. Patrick Riley said yesterday, "other factors were present."

Riley was testifying at the inquest into the death of Kevin Geldart, 34, of Riverview, N.B., who died May 5, 2005, after being shocked several times by RCMP officers.

• Canadian Press

More Canadian news on D12

2,000 more MDs needed

Do more to lure doctors back to Ontario, retain existing ones, province urged

TORONTO

The Liberal government needs to make a major effort to lure doctors back to Ontario and keep the ones it already has if it wants to reduce the "critical" shortage of physicians in the province, the Ontario Medical Association said yesterday.

The province needs to retain physicians currently practising in Ontario — especially the ones close to retirement age — and bring back those doctors working in the United States, said association president Dr. David Bach.

It also needs to provide incentives to attract and retain medical school graduates — such as deferring their student loan interest payments until after they've finished their residency — given that 30 per cent of them leave for other jurisdictions within two years of

training, the association said.

The province should also boost the number of doctors being trained from the current 760 and increase residency spots, Bach said.

"It makes no sense to me why we're not self-sufficient in training medical doctors," he said.

The medical association estimates the province is still short more than 2,000 physicians, leading to long wait times for specialist consultations, emergency-room overcrowding and patients unable to find a family doctor, says a report released yesterday.

But progress is being made, Bach said. One million Ontario residents are currently without a doctor, down from 1.2 million in 2005, the report said. The number of doctors relative to population growth has also increased since 2003. Ontario had 176 doctors per 100,000

residents in 2005, up from 171 in 2002, but down from 186 in 1995. "There have been some improvements recently, but this is a significant problem," Bach said.

"The demand for medical care is going to increase as technology advances and as our baby boomers get older."

A large chunk of the province's doctors are also close to retirement age, with 20 per cent of all doctors over 60, and 11 per cent over 65, the medical association said.

Joseph Lee, a family doctor and past-president of the K-W Academy of Medicine, said the number of doctors reaching retirement age locally is a significant problem. Departing doctors should be encouraged to take on a role in semi-retirement to help ease the shortage, he said yesterday.

Overall, Lee said steps are being made in the right direction to ease the shortage, including increased training and the use of family health teams.

Health Minister George Smitherman, who recently announced a recruitment drive aimed at the 3,000 doc-

tors who can practise in Ontario but are living elsewhere in North America, said the province has made "decent progress" in boosting the number of physicians in the province.

"We've enhanced the size of medical schools, done a much better job of taking advantage of our foreign-trained doctors," Smitherman said following an announcement yesterday of a job program for new nurses.

The province plans to spend \$89 million this year to guarantee that up to 4,000 new nursing graduates in Ontario will be given a shot at a full-time job, starting in the spring.

The province will pay for the first six months of work in the health-care field — including hospitals, long-term care, home care and mental health — while the employer is expected to pay for another six weeks. That gives the new nurses more than seven months to "transition" into a permanent full-time job, Smitherman said in a release.

• Canadian Press and Record staff

Parents hope TV will help them help son

BY TOBI COHEN

TORONTO

Jacob Trossman can't speak, eat or sit up by himself, but his parents make sure he leads the fullest life possible.

The four-and-a-half-year old goes to summer camp, has been attending a special school with other children since he was about 18 months old and adores his two-year-old twin sisters Jamie and Sierra, who like to make him laugh.

Tonight at 11:30, the bright-eyed Toronto boy will make his North American television debut on ABC's Nightline.

Jacob has a severe case of Pelizaeus-Merzbacher disease, a degenerative neurological disorder that can't be cured let alone treated with any proven medication.

His family has decided to hit the airwaves in the hopes of generating awareness about the rare genetic disease and support for a new drug that's shown promise in treating the disease in lab mice.

"I'm not kidding myself in thinking that it's a magic bullet that will make everything perfect," said Jacob's mother, Marcy White.

"But if it's able to give him some type of normalcy, or some way to vocalize, or a little bit of head control or muscle tone to help him do some things independently, it would just ... open a whole world for him."

Jacob has trouble breathing and



Marcy White reads to her son Jacob Trossman, 4, at their home in Toronto. Jacob has a severe case of Pelizaeus-Merzbacher disease, a degenerative neurological disorder. His story will be shown on ABC's Nightline tonight.

swallowing, has to be fed by a tube inserted into his stomach, is confined to a wheelchair and requires round-the-clock, one-on-one care. Caused by a lack of myelin, the fatty tissue that insulates nerve fibres in the brain, the disease is expected to get worse as Jacob gets older.

Any treatment that would make Jacob's life easier and more enjoyable "is just something that we have to do our best to track down to the ends of the earth," White said.

That's precisely what his parents have done since Jacob was diagnosed when he was 10 months old.

Their quest has drawn parallels with the 1992 Oscar-nominated movie "Lorenzo's Oil," in which the parents of a boy afflicted with a rare disease go to great lengths in search of a cure.

White and husband Andrew Trossman have taken it upon themselves to

comb through medical journals, scour the Internet and set up meetings with researchers to find a treatment.

They eventually found a McMaster University veterinary researcher who was studying a drug for other purposes, but considered its potential and brought it to the attention of Dr. Jim Garbern, a neurology professor and Pelizaeus-Merzbacher disease researcher at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit, Mich.

Garbern received permission from the pharmaceutical company that's been testing the drug as a treatment for spinal chord injuries to begin testing its effectiveness on the symptoms of the disease.

Over the last month, he's finally begun to see some positive results.

"Where the mice that would normally, without any treatment, have a very exaggerated tremor in their hind

limbs when they're walking, the animals, after about a day of treatment, had much better control of their limbs," said Garbern.

Garbern said the drug has so far had little effect on lifespan and doesn't appear to control the seizures, which are common in severe cases of the disease. Pending further testing, he suggested it might be most effective in treating the disease when used in combination with other medications.

Besides generating awareness and much needed funding for research, White hopes publicizing her son's story will spark interest among those in the Canadian medical community, which has so far focused little on Pelizaeus-Merzbacher disease, which is estimated to affect just one in about 500,000 live births.

• Canadian Press

Meighen latest Tory to get the boot from Senate committee

OTTAWA

Parliament's upper chamber has been swept up in a wave of acrimony and turmoil over a spate of forced Tory resignations from Senate committees.

The Conservatives say the musical chairs in committees is their prerogative and simply administrative.

The Liberals say it's a case of a crackdown on independent-minded senators by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

The latest to announce his resignation is Senator Michael Meighen, who told his colleagues on the security and defence committee late Monday that he has been told to resign as vice-chair. Meighen had served on the high-profile and prolific committee since its inception in 2001.

"I had a conversation with the leader of the government in the Senate, who asked me if I would tender my resignation," Meighen told the committee. "I have always been a loyalist to my party. I expressed my amazement to her. I am obviously not going to recount the nature of our conversation, but I indicated I was extremely disappointed."

Meighen had contradicted the government last fall when he defended a committee trip to the Middle East. The senators ran up a hefty tab in Dubai

when they were unable to get into Afghanistan, prompting the Tories to accuse the committee of wasting taxpayers' money on a junket and demanding an internal investigation.

Meighen's departure follows that of Tory luminary Hugh Segal, who announced he had been instructed to resign as chair of the foreign affairs committee. Senator Donald Oliver was asked to step down as chair of the legal and constitutional affairs committee to replace Segal, but was blocked by angry Liberal senators.

The government leader in the Senate, Marjory LeBreton, dismissed the allegation that the senators had been moved because of anything they had said or done on the committees.

"We were simply changing the vice-chair, and it was a decision of the caucus and of the leadership, and that's as far as I'm going to go."

She also derided the notion that she needed to get permission from the Liberals, who hold a majority of seats in the Senate, over changes the government wants there.

Her Liberal counterpart, Senator Celine Hervieux-Payette, said there's a time-honoured tradition of cordiality and consultation when deciding the helms of committees.

"We're appalled," she said.

• Canadian Press

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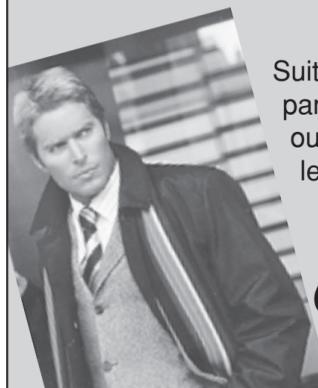
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