

Afghan mission rides on vote in Commons

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Wed, May 17, 2006

By **BILL RODGERS**, PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU

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LETTER TO  
THE EDITOR



After promising Canada wouldn't cut and run from Afghanistan, Prime Minister Stephen Harper is putting it all on the line tonight in a risky Commons vote that could end the mission next February.

In a sudden move this week, the Conservative government gave the opposition parties notice it would be seeking a two-year extension of Canada's dangerous Kandahar mission and expected their decision in a binding vote that will follow a six-hour debate.

The PM's action infuriated NDP foreign affairs critic Alexa McDonough.

"This is a kind of Rambo-style approach to what is a deadly serious issue," McDonough told CBC Newsworld yesterday.

### NDP CRY FLIP-FLOP

In the Commons, NDP Leader Jack Layton wondered if Harper had flip-flopped on his earlier stance that there was no need for a vote on Afghanistan because it was not a new commitment.

After five years, Harper said it was time for all parties to decide what their position is on the Afghan mission, making it clear his Tories aim to keep Canadian troops there.

"What we are doing there is not just protecting our national interest but providing

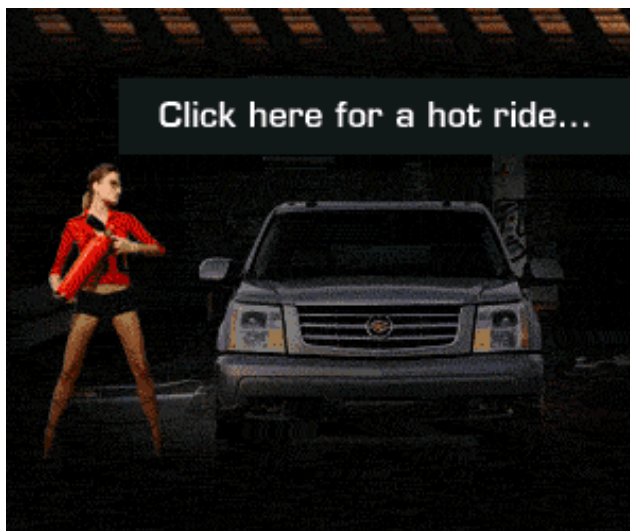
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international leadership and providing some real advancement to the standard of living and to the human rights of the Afghan people," the PM said.

#### LIBERALS HEDGING

The Liberals, who approved the current mission while in government, hedged when asked yesterday if they would vote for the extension. The Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois will firm up their positions this morning.

SES pollster Nik Nanos, who has tracked the softening public support for the mission, believes the minority government wants to get this done sooner rather than later.

"They're probably figuring out that it's better to deal with this now than in the fall or the spring of 2007, which is the primetime slot for an election campaign," Nanos said.

Sean Maloney, a professor in the war studies program at Royal Military College in Kingston, said he's confused over why politicians keep revisiting the Afghanistan mission. He noted Canada's military was in Bosnia for 14 years with far less debate at home.

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