

Afghanistan hot topic at meeting

By Stephanie Hounsell
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Three Canadian deaths in Afghanistan coming in the few days leading up to Halton MP Garth Turner's recent Town Hall meeting made for some spirited discussion among residents who attended.

One woman, who said her son has been in Afghanistan and is getting ready to return, said the media doesn't accurately portray what's going on.

"The public doesn't hear the good they (soldiers) do. All they hear are the deaths," said the woman, who didn't want to give her name, at the August 23 meeting at Hugh Foster Hall.

At the start of the meeting, Turner told the approximately 30 residents who attended that he was looking for their opinions on the matter.

"This is an issue we have to deal with," he said.

One person in the audience expressed his concern, saying the victims in Afghanistan are increasing day by day.

"I support our troops, but what they're doing I've got (concerns) with," said another audience member who thought Canada should pull out of the embattled country.

Yet another questioned what would happen to the women of Afghanistan if Canada pulled out.

Although he didn't voice much of an opinion on what he thought should be done, Turner said Canada's military is "carrying more than our weight, fight-

ing more than our class."

He suggested maybe Canadian soldiers need to rotate "out of the sharp end" of the task, adding that when NATO went into Afghanistan, it looked like a peacekeeping mission.

"But (now) it's a full-fledged war," he said.

Canada's role in Afghanistan was just one of several issues discussed at the meeting, which Turner said was a way for him to gain input from his constituents.

Another issue that crept up was the aging population and its general lack of savings — and the government's role in that.

Gas prices and finding a family doctor in Halton were other issues touched on, as was government spending.

"The (federal) government is spending more money than any other government in Canadian history," Turner said, adding, "I didn't expect that of the Conservative government."

One woman questioned Turner on the particular challenges he thinks Milton will face as its population continues to grow.

"I have concerns when there's very rapid growth in an area," Turner responded, listing traffic, the hospital's capability to meet needs and residents' quality of life as local areas of concern. "Housing is going up and the quality of life is going down."

He added the portion of the gas tax Milton is allotted never seems to keep up with its burgeoning population.

"I'm trying to get across to the feder-

al government that we need that money," Turner told the audience.

When it comes to housing prices in Milton and surrounding areas, Turner acknowledged that young couples seem to be putting off having children because they can't afford both kids and a house.

It becomes an even more difficult situation if one parent wants to stay at home with the children, he said, adding that's where the income splitting he's pushing for would help.

The meeting ended with applause for Turner.

"Garth, we're lucky to have you," said resident and former Canadian senator Betty Kennedy.

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