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## Promises, promises

With the deadline for municipal election filings looming, you can be sure that promises are already being made by political hopefuls. The funny thing about promises, as you probably know, is that they're often hard to keep.

Dalton McGuinty's provincial government knows exactly how hard it is to keep a promise. The premier's promise not to raise taxes after the 2003 election was promptly tested when his government introduced the new health care tax. And, on another front, McGuinty's government continues to wrestle with their promise to improve transparency and accountability in government, including municipal government.

When the provincial legislature resumes sitting Sept. 25, Bill 130 will be among the pieces of legislation under consideration. Bill 130 – The Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act, 2006 – proposes a multitude of changes to the Municipal Act, including a clarification on closed meetings.

The current law allows closed or in camera meetings by municipal governments only when discussions pertain to municipal property, litigation or personnel matters. Despite these parameters, councils or factions thereof have been known to hold closed meetings to hammer out voting strategy in advance of a public meeting. How do we know this? It's generally apparent when motions are approved in shotgun fashion during a public meeting to a chorus of "Carried" without much, if any, debate.

Liberal MPP Caroline DiCocco worked doggedly for several years to gather support for a far-reaching private members' bill that would have required meetings of all publicly funded bodies to be open to the public. Unfortunately, when she was named Minister of Culture, DiCocco could no longer sponsor the bill and no other MPP came forward as her replacement. Bill 130 now appears to be the government's feeble attempt to address the issue of closed meetings specifically for municipal councils. Ironically, it proposes a new type of closed meeting that has many people concerned.

Meetings at which no member of council discusses or "materially advances the business or decision-making of the council" would be considered closed to the public under Bill 130. What does that mean? The fear is that some councillors will interpret it to mean that they can debate the issues outside the public spotlight but reserve the decision-making for the open meeting. So much for transparency and accountability to the taxpayer.

Bill 130 has only passed first reading. Hopefully it will at least be sent to a review committee for greater scrutiny. And, if transparency and accountability were really a concern, the government would conduct public consultations to ensure that these objectives were actually met.

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The NDP took a large step backwards in Quebec City last weekend, when their policy convention voted to terminate the Canadian mission to Afghanistan. If this discourages our forces in the field, it would be easy to see why.

It is much easier to be in Canada defending one's self-styled high moral ground in regards to this issue, than it is to tangle with Taliban terrorists halfway around the world. All the more stunning is Jack Layton's political reasons and his unbelievable timing of the announcement.

The NDP, worried about inroads in British Columbia by the Green Party in the last federal vote, hope to prove they are more left wing than the Greens! But with this week's anniversary of the horror of 9/11, carried out under the stewardship of Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, Layton's position does not do Canada credit.

Afghanistan is a Liberal mission under NATO, continued by the new Conservative government.



**opinion**  
bill gay

War means casualties. As Civil War general Sherman pointed out so long ago, "War is hell and you cannot refine it." This is why Canada supports the United Nations and multilateral negotiation whenever possible.

Canada is not a pacifist nation but we do love peace. What nation that has suffered the war dead Canada has wouldn't?

Our purpose in

Afghanistan is to ensure the Afghan people will never again have to live under the heel of a terrorist regime, to rebuild their non-existent infrastructure and to see to it that terrorists launch no more attacks against North America from their caves in Afghanistan.

If you attended the Royal Canadian Legion service for the late Leo Chartier, and talked with veterans like Howard Large, your pride at being Canadian couldn't help but soar. Finally, we are giving Canada's veterans the honour they earned at such great cost. Let us remember their great military and humanitarian tradition by backing our Canadian forces now engaged in heavy fighting with all we have. Mr. Layton, that includes moral support.

Don't let us lose on the home front what many others earn for Canada under Taliban mortar fire as Canadian Forces risk their lives to keep us safe here at home.

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