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Statement by:

The Honourable Pamela Wallin

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

THE SENATE

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Hon. Pamela Wallin: Honourable senators, I had the privilege to attend November 11 ceremonies in Kandahar with 11 family members of fallen soldiers.

Canada is the only country that has this kind of program that allows families to travel to the place where they lost their loved one and to meet fellow soldiers who knew, loved and worked with the lost soldier. One of the mothers said to us that she came with a broken heart and left with one that was healing.

Minister of National Defence Peter MacKay also presented a Canadian Sacrifice Medal, the first awarded in Afghanistan, to Sergeant Vince Adams who had been wounded by a bomb. After his recovery, he returned to Afghanistan to finish his tour. He is now teaching his fellow soldiers about ways of detecting and avoiding roadside bombs.

This remains a brutal reality for our troops. We met with many of them, visiting not only the main base in Kandahar, but travelling, as well, to four forward operating bases where our troops are working with and living alongside Afghan soldiers and providing direct security to Afghan villages.

We also met with our volunteer civilians and military personnel working with the PRT, the provincial reconstruction teams. We traveled to the Dahla Dam, Canada's signature project designed to bring clean water to a thirsty desert.

It is nearly two years since I was in Afghanistan. It was with great pride that this time we travelled on Canadian Chinooks with Canadian pilots, with air cover provided by Canadian Griffins.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Wallin: To see the progress in ensuring security and civilian support is both real and impressive. Morale is high and there is a sense of hope and accomplishment.

Our mission in Afghanistan has matured and we are at the very heart of the allied operation. We are considered and acknowledged by our allies, including U.S. General Stanley McChrystal whom we met, to be the brains of the Afghan operation. They are all looking to put a little more Canada in their approach.

This is an incredible tribute to our troops and to our civilian volunteers, to their selflessness, fearlessness and their strength of character. Their willingness to risk their lives to protect those of strangers is the ultimate act of patriotism. We thank them.
