

Local MP David Tilson condemns Liberals over \$10.5m Khadr payout



By Mike Pickford

Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson has this week followed his party's lead in condemning Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Liberal government over their handling of the Omar Khadr saga.

It was revealed last Wednesday (July 5) that Mr. Khadr would receive a \$10.5 million settlement and an official apology from the Canadian government after it was alleged his rights as a Canadian citizen were abused during a ten-year imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay, which began when he was just 16 years of age. Mr. Tilson says that payout and subsequent apology is "unacceptable" considering Mr. Khadr's status as "a convicted terrorist."

"Canadians from all across the country are rightfully appalled at this reported settlement," Mr. Tilson stated in a release to media. "It is one thing to acknowledge alleged mistreatments; however, it is an entirely different thing to award a convicted terrorist who murdered an allied soldier and wounded another."

In 2010, following eight-years' detention at Guantanamo Bay, Mr. Khadr pleaded guilty to the murder of U.S. Delta Forces Sergeant Christopher Speer after he allegedly admitted to having thrown a grenade during a firefight in Afghanistan in July 2002. The same blast is alleged to have maimed another American soldier, Layne Morris, who was blinded in one eye as a result of the battle. Mr. Khadr was just 15 at the time of the attack. Under a plea deal, he would serve at least one more year in Guantanamo Bay before any potential transfer into Canadian custody. He was eventually transferred in September 2012.

Mr. Khadr has claimed he was exposed to torture during his time at Guantanamo Bay and was pressured into admitting he killed Sgt. Speers. He has since adjusted his position, stating simply that he does not know whether he threw the fatal grenade, but hopes he didn't. During his time at Guantanamo Bay, he was interrogated by Canadian officials, which led to the Supreme Court of Canada ruling in 2008 that the government had acted illegally and contravened Mr. Khadr's rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a ruling they upheld in 2009.

In 2013, Mr. Khadr's lawyers filed a \$20-million civil lawsuit against the Government of Canada, alleging it had conspired with the U.S. in abusing his rights. The suit remained unresolved until last Wednesday's announcement. Speaking to media at the conclusion of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany last week, Prime Minister Trudeau defended the government's decision to apologize to Mr. Khadr.

"The Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects all Canadians. Every one of us, even when it is uncomfortable," Prime Minister Trudeau said. "This is not about the detail or the merits of the Khadr case. When the government violates any Canadian's Charter rights we all end up paying for it."

Mr. Tilson wasn't the only one outraged by the decision - his Conservative leader Andrew Scheer denounced the government for making "a convicted terrorist" one of the richest men in the country.

Additionally, a new poll released by the Angus Reid Institute this week revealed that more than two-thirds of Canadians feel Prime Minister Trudeau made the wrong decision in awarded the settlement to Mr. Khadr.

"Mr. Khadr's lawyer has argued Mr. Khadr suffered torture at the hands of the U.S. military and violated his human rights while he was detained at Guantanamo Bay and that the Canadian government was complicit. These allegations should be heard and addressed in the courts where this was taking place," Mr. Tilson asserted.

Now that a decision has been made, Mr. Tilson, again repeating his party's position, called on Mr. Khadr to give any settlement money he may receive to Sgt. Speer's widow and two children. Tabitha Speer, alongside Layne Morris, were successful in a 2015 wrongful death and injury lawsuit against Mr. Khadr, where a Utah court awarded the duo \$134 million (U.S.) in damages after Mr.

Khadr, still then imprisoned, did not respond to the suit. The plaintiffs have filed an application to make the judgment enforceable in Canada and are asking the court to freeze Mr. Khadr's assets.

When a Canadian soldier is killed or injured in battle, the government provides a lump sum payment up to a maximum of \$360,000. Despite this, the current Liberal government is willing to provide \$10.5 million to a convicted terrorist who actively sought to kill Canadian and allied soldiers, Mr. Tilson said. Such a settlement making a convicted terrorist one of the wealthiest men in Canada isn't acceptable to the Canadian taxpayer, not to our Canadian Values.

He concluded, Canadians deserve better from their government.