

DOOR NUMBER 3?

Europe's first transvestite politician turned away from women's bathroom

Which bathroom should a transgender politician be using in parliament? The thorny question rocked Italy's lower House, home to Europe's first transvestite MP, yesterday. "You can't use this lavatory. This is the women's bathroom," Vladimir Luxuria reported being told by centre-right lawmaker Elisabetta Gardini, triggering a spat that forced the Speaker of parliament to intervene. Born male, Ms. Luxuria



wears women's clothes but has not had sex-change surgery. Elected for the centre-left in April, the 40-year-old former drag queen and defender of gay rights prefers to be called she. "It would be very embarrassing for me to use the men's bathroom. For me, and for the men themselves," Ms. Luxuria said. Centre-right lawmakers are calling for the creation of a third, "transgender" lavatory. Reuters

LINDA FRUM INTERVIEW

A DIPLOMAT'S CRUSADING WIFE

Afghanistan has a passionate defender living in Ottawa



LINDA FRUM in Ottawa



JANA CHYTILOVA FOR NATIONAL POST

Khorshied Samad, wife of the first Afghanistan ambassador to Canada, was raised in California and went to work in Kabul as a freelance producer for ABC News in 2002.

When Khorshied Samad's husband, Omar Samad, was posted to Canada as the ambassador from Afghanistan in 2004, Mrs. Samad's first duty was to scout out a home that would serve as Ottawa's first-ever Afghan ambassador's residence.

"I spent six weeks looking at properties until we found this one," she says of the Moorish-style, white stucco home they eventually purchased.

Mrs. Samad and I are sitting in the bright, oriental-carpeted living room, while her first-born, 12-week-old Soleiman, naps peacefully nearby.

"It's not a large property, but it's a beautiful piece of land, and it's very symbolic, representing the important relationship between Afghanistan and Canada. There is a plaque outside commemorating the visit of the Afghan foreign minister when he officially opened the house last year. And President Karzai came here to visit. I mean, once you step on the property, this is considered Afghan land. I am still getting my mind around that! The embassy is only a lease. That's a future goal — to buy an embassy — but Afghanistan is a poor country."

If the Afghan ambassador's residence is modest by Ottawa standards, its very existence is something of a miracle, and so is the creative and lovely woman who lives inside: The daughter of an Afghan exile, raised in America, she is more active and outspoken than the typical diplomat's wife. Her responsibility, as she sees it, is to assist her husband in convincing Canadians about the ongoing urgency of our role in the creation of a modern, female-empowered, Western-friendly Afghanistan.

"Everywhere I go in Canada," Mrs. Samad says, "I get asked: 'What's going on with the women and children?' 'Do Canada's 2,200 soldiers really make a difference?' And then there are people who come up to me and say: 'Aren't our soldiers killing innocent civilians?' 'Don't you hate us?'"

"And I tell them: 'Absolutely not.' If you were to take a poll in Afghanistan, 95% of the people — or even higher — desperately want Canadians there, want the other international coalition there. They realize how important it is because they've gone through 23 years of war, and they don't want the Taliban returning."

Mrs. Samad brings unusual skill to her role. A former Kabul bureau chief for Fox News, she recently helped curate (with Jane McElhone) "Voices on the Rise," an exhibit of 25 strikingly beautiful photos by Canadian female photographers that focuses on Afghan women exercising their dearly won freedoms of expression.

The exhibit "reveals how the women communicators of Afghanistan are true revolutionaries who, through their work, are helping to ensure all Afghan women are given a voice."

The show, currently on display at the MacOdrum Library at Carleton University, was previously on exhibit at the University of Ottawa, where Mrs. Samad is also a Master's student.

On the day that I meet her she is still on cloud nine because of a visit by the Governor-General the day before. Madame Mich elle Jean had requested a private viewing of the show and was moved to tears by it.

It is indeed a powerful display. Two photos in particular got to me. One was of a radio producer, interviewing a local minister, her microphone thrust boldly into his face, her own face erased by a bur'qa. (And yet, that she is allowed to talk to him at all must be taken as a sign of progress.) The second was a photo of the beautiful but lifeless face of a young woman, murdered because of the provocative nature of her job — host of a MuchMusic-type television program on Tolo TV.

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# CANADA

'I don't think Canadians completely understand why Canada is in Afghanistan and the reasons why they are sacrificing.' — *Khorshied Samad, wife of Afghanistan's ambassador to Canada*

COMMENT

## Feds make sweating complicated

Tax credit for child sports is unnecessarily complex



**DON MARTIN**  
in Ottawa

eral help takes place on a playground or in a gym.

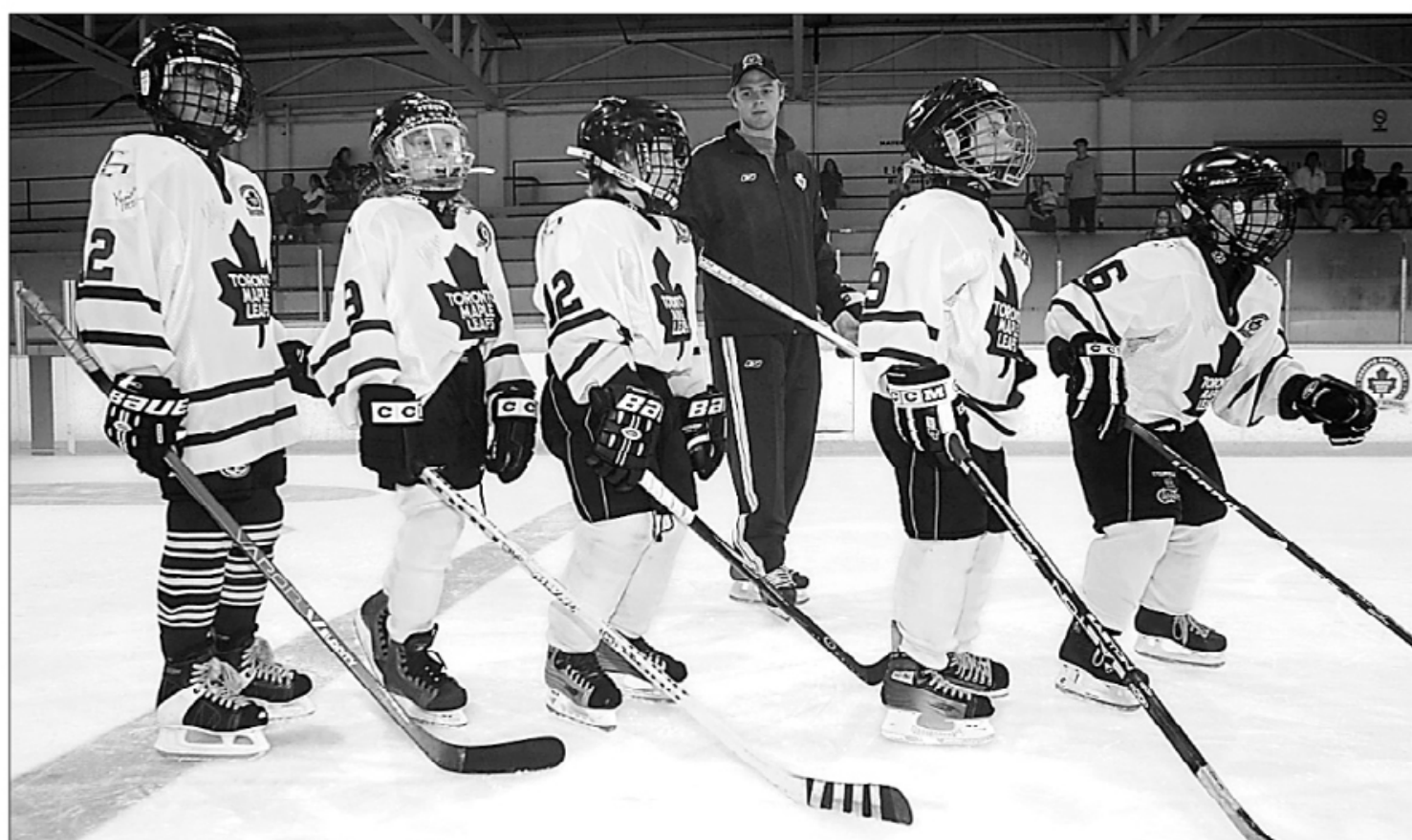
An expert panel to devise a functional tax credit to stimulate fitness activity in youth submitted its report this week. And while the Liberals insist the \$78 tax reduction to offset fees or equipment costs is too little for low-income families, the hockey and soccer parents of Canada can only rejoice at proposed help in defraying the costly exercise of funding competitive sport for kids.

Still, the plan's devilish details foreshadow bad news for some parents and a fattened bureaucracy to referee the program for taxpayers.

The panel was the Finance Minister's way to arm's-length the picking of winners and losers in subsidized sport, keeping decisions away from politicians lest they offend the voting parents of athletes engaged in questionable fitness activities. Beer pong comes to mind.

The panel's overarching guideline: No sweat, no credit.

"We've taken a very broad approach but our emphasis is on cardio-respiratory endurance — kids have to sweat in order to get the benefit of this tax credit," Dr. Kellie Leitch, the panel chairwoman, said at a news conference called to un-



COLIN O'CONNOR FOR NATIONAL POST

Minor hockey would qualify for a tax credit, but your child's passion for horseback riding would not, according to new tax guidelines.

veil the plan on Thursday.

That would seem to eliminate sailing, which is an Olympic event, as a perspiration-inducing activity. While darts tends to be more about pub and beer socializing than pre-teen aerobic exercise, one could argue it takes a steady hand to avoid hitting nearby patrons instead of the target. While I'm not sure how much sweat is shed while careening down a luge or bobsled track, I would argue soiling one's pants qualifies as a sure sign it's a strenuous activity.

All this is not to belittle the commendable goal of the Conservatives' campaign promise.

We are a growing nation of child chubbies. As someone whose siblings still let loose a knee-slapping howl when recalling my

struggle to pull myself to my feet in the playpen as an overweight 16-month-old, anything to fight fat early in life makes sense to me.

So if a modest tax break stimulates Fat Albert to abandon the video game for anything else, it's a valid use of public money.

The problem with the expert panel applying a general sweat-based guideline is that it will now force Revenue Canada to rule on the validity of claims. By seeking to keep it simple, they may have made it excessively complicated.

The panel was chaired by Ms. Leitch, a brilliant pediatric surgeon and no slouch as a political operative either. She's chair of pediatrics at the Children's Hospital of Western Ontario and still

found time last year to help the Conservatives as co-chair of their Ontario election campaign.

She sees a "chronic" number of obese children in her clinic requiring treatment for stress fractures, early arthritis and lower limb deformities.

And because fat cells form early in life, chubby kids usually become fat adults with all the health complications that accompany a burgeoning waistline.

"Three times as many kids are obese today as they were 15 years ago," Leitch told me. "We are experiencing the first generation of children that won't live as long as their parents."

That's a mighty scary scenario. So the feds are right to take action, if only to offset the future health

costs of an expanding generation.

While it's doubtful a middle- or upper-class family would consider the \$78 credit the key to enrolling their kids in sports camp or a soccer league, every inducement helps. And it's a particularly welcome move for the parents of disabled children, whose tax credit is doubled.

But a sport is a sport and even aerobically mild activities can encourage a youth to pick up the pace of a sedate lifestyle in other ways.

The government should allow the parents of children in any organized sport or fitness activity to claim the credit — and stop sweating the details.

National Post  
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## Samad went to Kabul for ABC

FRUM

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"What I'm trying to get across in this exhibition," Mrs. Samad says, "is that these people are struggling so hard against a set of circumstances that are unfathomable in the Western world. They have to go up against so many obstacles that we will never experience, and they live their lives with such honesty and integrity.

"Every day, just to get up and try to make a difference in a country like Afghanistan requires so much courage and so much tenacity and such sacrifice."

Khorshied Samad visited Afghanistan for the first time only in 2002. It is where she met her husband, a third-generation diplomat, who at the time was a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry.

Mrs. Samad came to Kabul as a freelance producer for ABC News, having abandoned a well-paying job in New York in the marketing department of ABC.

"It was just six months after the Taliban had left and there was still a lot of insecurity there, but I just was motivated. I went for two weeks and decided to move there. There was nothing more important in the world for me than to be in Afghanistan at that time.

"You could do anything there, whether you were a journalist, whether you opened a business, whether you took a job, they needed you. They still do. There's so much to do. So much to fix. And I just got so swept up by what I saw and felt that if I could help these people, this is what I want to do."

The late Peter Jennings was a mentor, and so was friend Christiane Amanpour, the famous CNN international correspondent.

With their encouragement, Ms. Samad earned her stripes as a field producer and, eventually, a foreign correspondent.

Mrs. Samad grew up in California, and she presents in that breezy, friendly, West Coast kind of way. She is Muslim, though she was raised in a mixed marriage. Her Afghan father came to America as a stu-

dent in the '60s and her Iowa-raised mother is Dutch Catholic.

"My parents met at Berkeley in the '60s — they're very tolerant, progressive people. My parents opened the very first Afghan restaurant in all of North America in 1968, the Khyber Pass, in Oakland, California. My mother learned to be an amazing Afghan cook.

"Even though I was raised in the States, we were very much exposed to the Afghan culture. I was raised as a Muslim as well as kind of as a Catholic. I'm kind of schizoid. My parents exposed us to all to the great world religions. We have a menorah in our house, some Buddhas and Christian icons. My parents raised us with this beautiful, Bay Area world view, you know?"

The baby starts to cry and Mrs. Samad goes to fetch him. She is dressed, as is her custom, Western style, in black trousers, a silk

**'I JUST GOT SO SWEPT UP BY WHAT I SAW AND FELT'**

turtleneck, with a magnificent teal-coloured silk shawl tossed over one shoulder.

When Soleiman spits up on it she laughs warmly. I soon learn that the shawl represents another aspect of Mrs. Samad's activism.

"This is my project," she explains, fanning out the shawl for me to see, while rocking her baby. "These shawls are woven by a group of women we're supporting in Kabul. We teach them how to hand-weave on looms. The shawls are made with silk from Herat and vegetable dyes.

"This type of tradition was under threat of being lost because under the Taliban, you know, artists are the first to suffer, right? The only thing that was really encouraged was carpet weaving, but painting, sculpture, anything like that had pretty much gone by the wayside.

"So we have a small co-op of women making these shawls and we give the women literacy lessons every day — because

they're all illiterate — and they have their lunch and they learn how to read and write, and they're supporting their families."

Equally as important as her contribution to the functioning of this Kabul co-op, is Mrs. Samad's mission to help persuade Canadians of the nobility and necessity of our country's role in Afghanistan.

"I don't think Canadians completely understand why Canada is in Afghanistan and the reasons why they are sacrificing," she says with emotion.

"They can see that Taliban are being killed and their own people are being killed — and my husband and I have been to many of those funerals — and thinking of them makes me cry — but what are the reasons? They're helping to ensure that these women have rights.

"Imagine, for so many years you don't have any access to society, you cannot speak in public, you have no political voice, you cannot work, you cannot go to school, you cannot leave your home without a male relative, you cannot travel, you cannot receive medical care, especially if it's from a male doctor.

"I mean, imagine for six years you're living in that kind of environment, and suddenly, at least on paper, to be seen as an equal citizen, to have the constitution recognize equal rights between men and women. And it's a precarious situation. It's a fragile democracy.

"So if the international community — including Canada — doesn't stay the course, it could easily go backward.

"And look what happened when the world abandoned Afghanistan in the late '80s and early '90s. Al-Qaeda was able to find a home. Osama bin Laden was able to turn Afghanistan into his training camp. And would they do that again? In a heartbeat."

National Post  
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Anyone wishing to support Mrs. Samad's shawl project, can contact [www.artezandesigns.com](http://www.artezandesigns.com)

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To see some of the photos from the exhibition, check under Online Extras.



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