

# Ottawa Notebook

JANE TABER AND THE GLOBE'S PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU SET THE AGENDA



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## **A maternal-health answer and more Helena Guergis questions**

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**1. Avoiding the abortion debate.** Keith Martin, a Liberal MP and medical doctor, may just have found an “out” for Stephen Harper and his maternal health initiative for this summer’s G8 – let another country focus on providing safe abortions.

First some background: The Prime Minister’s signature initiative for the summit appears to be in jeopardy after Hillary Clinton’s assertion last week that any such project must include access to abortion. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband later added his voice to that of the U.S. Secretary of State.

The Harper government has vowed that it will not reopen the abortion debate through this initiative. But with the criticisms of the British and the Americans, the initiative is in grave jeopardy if not dead already.

There may be a way to salvage it, however.

In a recent article in The Mark, Dr. Martin finds a way for Mr. Harper to “square” his opposition to abortion “while implementing an effective plan to reduce maternal and childhood mortality.”

Dr. Martin, who has worked in Africa and on this issue for previous G8 summits, says the Prime Minister should propose that each member country concentrate on one aspect of the initiative. For example, he writes, that Canada “could be the lead nation on training healthcare workers and micronutrients, another country could focus on providing medications, another on access to family planning and safe abortions etc.”

"In this way a, a comprehensive plan that focuses on enabling the world's poorest to access basic primary care services can be implemented, with the G8 countries dividing responsibilities and target resources."

Interesting advice the Tories might want to consider given that Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon said on CTV's *Question Period* yesterday that the government – regardless of the U.S. and British positions – is pushing ahead with the initiative. What he didn't say was how the government would find a solution amid the entrenched positions from key allies.

A meeting of G8 development ministers later this month in Halifax, led by Canada's Bev Oda, will consider the initiative in advance of this summer's summit.

Take the Martin article with you – or take Dr. Martin.