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Paying our own way

For years we have been telling successive Liberal governments in Canada that they have badly botched the national defence file.

Waves of budget cuts have hamstrung our military on the world stage and all but eliminated any ability our Armed Forces might once have had to protect us from attack.

Our protestations, unfortunately, have fallen on deaf ears and our military has served as a convenient target whenever the government was looking for an area where it could save a few bucks.

Meanwhile, we have relied increasingly on our mighty neighbour to the south to do the real work when it comes to protecting North America. In other words, they cover our butts.

Why, our government seemed to wonder, should it invest in planes and ships and personnel when our best friends had an arsenal and a budget that we could never even dream about.

But what if the Americans one day caught on?

What if they looked at Canada and said: "Hey neighbour, can you pitch in with a little support here?"

It turns out that is pretty much what did happen when U.S. President George W. Bush visited Canada late last year, telling Prime Minister Paul Martin it was time for Canada to start defending itself by at least getting on board with a strategy to protect our shared continent from missile attack.

According to a Canadian official who attended a private session between the two leaders, Bush told Martin: "I'm not taking this position, but some future president is going to say, Why are we paying to defend Canada?"

We couldn't have put it any better ourselves.

Why indeed, prime minister?

We have reduced ourselves to the equivalent of the skinny schoolyard kid who is content in the knowledge the bad guys won't pick on him because he has a big, tough brother.

But in our case, when our brother offers to stand up for us, we can't even muster the courage to say publicly that we're on his side.

Let's put an end to the political waffling and tell Canadians and Americans alike that when it comes to defending our borders, Canada is ready to stand and be counted.

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