

The Budget—Mr. McKnight

It has not been easy for the leadership of Canada's Armed Forces to see the debt crisis undermine these plans that military and civilian officials at the Department of National Defence have a duty to both Canada and to the men and women who are serving Canada to bring into fruition.

I firmly believe that a failure to act now would require very dangerous sacrifices as to capability in the future. The military leadership as reflected on the defence budget produced a significant contribution to debt reduction. That has to be recognized and one that I wish we had not had to ask for.

Through the Budget discussions, they offered to me the forthright advice that I needed and that I required to protect the capability of the forces within a much less than adequate budget than had been planned for a short time ago.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, thanks to their contribution, the goals and efforts of the White Paper are still attainable and while armed forces modernization will take place at a slower rate over a longer period than intended, that modernization will take place.

One of the things that bothers me is that the military did not contribute to this problem. Unfortunately our options in resolving the situation are limited and we have to call on the resources we have in order to prevent a larger debt and an even greater tragedy that could take place in the years ahead.

We accept the responsibility on this side of the House for what must be done. As Minister for Defence, I am responsible for contributing to the struggle against the debt while maintaining the integrity of our Armed Forces. Our military leadership has done its duty in supporting the necessary budgetary policies put forward by the Government, and I believe it is my duty to ensure that the rebuilding of our capability resumes without further delay and diversion.

I take the opportunity at this time to reiterate that the Government found these decisions difficult. As difficult as those decisions were, the Government had the courage to act upon them because of the necessity for future generations of Canadians, so that those Canadians would not be impaired in their ability to take part in the life and

economy of this country as we know it as a result of lack of will or leadership by the Government of the day.

Mr. Harb: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to comment too much about the speech on the Budget because the Hon. Member concentrated more on the Defence Department and the budget cut in his Department as a way to reduce the deficit. In my view, that cut has left the Department defenceless.

My question to the Hon. Minister concerns those 14 or so bases that are going to be shut down over the next years. Could he tell us what is going to happen to those bases once they are shut down? Will they remain or will they be torn down? I heard some rumours that the Government intends to tear them down. Is that the view of the Minister? If so, could he inform the House?

Mr. McKnight: Mr. Speaker, the bases and stations that were identified in the Budget for either closure or rationalization will be closed or rationalized starting in 1990. The work force adjustment program is now in force in the Department of National Defence and will be further developed. That adjustment program for civilian employees will provide for priority hiring, redeployment, reallocation of families, or retraining, if necessary, for a period of up to two years, and will allow time off for job interviews in either the private or the public sector. This program will allow these civilian employees, both men and women, to have an opportunity to continue employment either within the Government of Canada or outside the Government.

The question which the Hon. Member asked regarding the bases and their structure will involve those communities affected. The Department has gone through this process in other years under other administrations and it has always been—and I have experienced it within my own constituency—the Department's intent to allow for reuse to take place, for committees to be established locally, for opportunities for industry or other Government Departments to locate in those infrastructures already there. This will happen as bases are identified and the reuse committees are structured involving the community and community leaders.

The Department of Public Works has the responsibility for disposal. In other words, as other Government Departments turn over their assets for disposal, they will be offered to another Government agency. If there is no governmental use, they will be offered to the community and the private sector. The past experience I had in my riding shows that with co-operation between the communities and Government, alternate uses can be found.