

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has refused to answer the question concerning helicopters.

I would like to point out the Minister of National Defence last week said that if one asks the Department of National Defence, it will give programs it will cancel first before cancelling the program for helicopters.

I would like to know from the Prime Minister why there are some programs within the Department of National Defence that make even less sense than buying helicopters to fight the cold war. When will the government act on these programs, if they exist, to ensure that the Department of National Defence or other departments are not spending money like drunken sailors?

An hon. member: If anybody knows about that it is you.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, given the record of my hon. friend in spending government money I would not want to offend any sailor, drunken or otherwise. My hon. friend should be careful.

An hon. member: Very careful.

• (1420)

Mr. Mulroney: I say this with respect. His record, for example as President of the Treasury Board, is probably the worst fiasco in public spending in the history of Canada. The figures are there. We would be happy to table them and have a debate precisely on that.

With regard to the expenditures of the defence department, we have had the debate—

Mr. Dingwall: More sleazy appointments?

Mr. Mulroney: My hon. friend says “more sleazy appointments”. We just appointed—

Mr. Dingwall: By you?

Mr. Mulroney: By me. We just appointed Lucie Pépin, a former Liberal member of Parliament, to a 10-year appointment to the National Parole Board.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Again the Prime Minister is evading the question. I asked him a very simple question.

Last week the Minister of National Defence said that she might reduce the number of helicopters from 50 to a lower number. A month ago she said that we should not cut one of these helicopters.

I want to know from the government when it will scrap this program. We do not need it at all. It is \$5.8 billion of waste. We need the money to cut the deficit or do something to create some growth in Canada.

Hon. Kim Campbell (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that this project does is create 45,000 person-years of employment in Canada in an area of high technology.

I would point out to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that the Department of National Defence has had its budget cut by \$12 billion since 1989. Clearly the government has set priorities in expenditures and the Department of National Defence has cut back.

It is also important to point out that the choice is not between spending this money on the helicopters and zero; it is between spending this money on helicopters of 1990 technology for Canadian men and women in the services and throwing away \$2.5 billion to extend the life of 40-year old helicopters after which time, five or ten years at the maximum, we would have to face the question of replacing them.

If that is Liberal economics, Mr. Speaker, I do not think we want any on this side of the House.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister.

His Minister of National Defence has said she can eliminate the deficit in five years. His Minister of the Environment has said he can do it in only four years. I want to ask the Prime Minister who does he agree with, the Minister of National Defence or the Minister of the Environment? Or does he agree with his Minister of Finance who said only last December that “if you shut the whole government operation down you would not balance the deficit”?

Does anyone in that gang over there really know what they are doing?