

Oral Questions

I will be writing to the hon. member because we do not have time in the House to correct all of the false impressions he leaves upon the record of Parliament.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps we should move on. The hon. member for Yukon.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. He is aware that this morning, I sent the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition a letter asking that a free vote be held on the question of war. It has become increasingly clear that for all Canadian men and women, the decision whether or not to go to war is a personal one. It is a matter of conscience and also a matter of the kind of information available to each person.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Ms. McLaughlin: The decision each and everyone of us must make is the most non-partisan decision we will ever have to make in our lives. My question for the Prime Minister is: Will he hold a free vote on this question?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I answered this question yesterday. As far as the government is concerned, the policies we adopted were approved after full and vigorous debate in our national caucus, a debate that started in August last year.

I have not asked a single member—not yesterday or the day before and I will not do so in the future—to vote along any kind of line on this issue. Our members will confirm that after these vigorous and interesting debates in caucus, I go out and defend the interests of the government as I see them. I admit that a number of important and personal questions have been raised by a number of members, including several members on this side of the House, and I did not ask anyone how he or she is going to vote.

I assume that considering the fact that members were personally and actively involved in preparing this important policy, those members will support the government. I have not asked for any guarantees or opinions of any kind whatsoever. However, I realize the hon. member

has a position she would like to make quite clear and it is one that I respect.

• (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I presume the Prime Minister and his government took the decision to have Canada participate in a war in the gulf based on some information. When the United States Congress voted on its resolution, which certainly passed narrowly, authorizing the use of military force against Iraq, it added that the U.S. President must come before Congress and both give reasons why sanctions had not worked and what other information was then available.

Presuming that the Prime Minister made this decision and took the position based on information available to him about whether economic sanctions have worked or not, will he table that information with this House so that we may also have access to that information?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the New Democratic Party will know that there was a lengthy hearing of the standing committee that dealt with the questions of sanctions. I presented a very full presentation. I indicated I would be prepared to have confidential briefings with others for further information. I made it clear that the information we had that was in confidence was not different in its effect from what was being presented to the committee.

I can tell the member now and the House that there continues to be very broad international respect for sanctions. It is one of the most effectively adhered to programs in the world. That is on the outside. The question is. What is happening on the inside? Is it affecting the military capacity of Saddam Hussein? The answer sadly is that there is no evidence that it is. There is a problem, Mr. Speaker, a problem that would be very troubling to the Leader of the New Democratic Party, that is that no matter how tight these sanctions of unprecedented tightness are, foodstuffs and strategic imports such as chemical additives, lubricants, water purification chemicals, and spare parts are reaching Iraq undetected. They are needed in relatively small volumes and they can be transported by air or overland by truck or pack animal, or by small boats capable of eluding naval interdiction.