

Oral Questions

cannot help but say that I am deeply gratified by the action of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

PROPOSED COMMITTEE STUDY OF MOVING DEPARTMENT TO
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND—MOTION UNDER S.O. 43

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of urgent and pressing necessity under the terms of Standing Order 43. In light of the fact that it has been revealed that the transfer of the Department of Veterans Affairs from Ottawa to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island will cost an estimated \$20 million and will create another level of bureaucracy in Ottawa, in light of the objections raised by the Public Service Alliance of Canada and veterans' organizations, and especially in view of the fact that budget cut-backs in military hospitals have created waiting lists of veterans seeking admission, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Portage (Mr. Masniuk):

That this House ask the government to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to ask the Minister of Veterans Affairs to justify the expenditure of \$20 million on a transfer that all involved oppose at a time of restraint and when military hospitals must restrict admittance because of budget cut-backs, and further that the committee study the objections made by the PSAC and the veterans' organizations.

Mr. Speaker: For such a motion to be presented the House must give its unanimous consent.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

GROUNDING OF TANKER "ARGO MERCHANT"—ACTION TO
PREVENT POLLUTION OF CANADIAN WATERS—SURVEILLANCE
OF WRECK

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): Mr. Speaker, my questions are directed to the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment, and they concern the impending environmental devastation which may result from the breakup of the *Argo Merchant* which, as of this morning, has released over 5 million gallons of crude oil, or to put it in grim perspective, twice as much oil as the *Arrow* spill in Chedabucto Bay six years ago. In view of the severe consequences which this spill could have, not only on the aesthetic beauty of our coastline, but on the marine life in the prolific Georges Bank, will the minister tell this House what action he will be taking to ensure that the spill does not affect Canada or Canadian waters?

[Mr. Speaker.]

In addition, will he indicate whether his department has the wreck under direct surveillance and if so what his current estimate is of the chances that part of the oil slick will enter Canadian waters?

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and the Environment): Mr. Speaker, this matter obviously changes almost as often as the wind changes. It is the very problem we are dealing with. The latest report I had, about three hours ago, is fairly optimistic about the chances of the oil slick not reaching Canadian shores. A meeting was going on at ten o'clock this morning in Halifax so I have not had a report on it yet. Our officials are keeping in very close touch. The fact is, we are facing very difficult weather conditions.

POSSIBILITY OF BANNING UNSAFE TANKERS FROM CANADIAN
WATERS

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that tankers of dubious registry such as the *Argo Merchant*—which is reported to have been involved in 18 previous accidents including two groundings and is in fact banned from our ports—are little more than potential environmental catastrophes, will the minister tell the House whether he is able to acquire powers to ban these ships from operating within our 200 mile limit, powers that would be similar to those already available to the Minister of Transport, for example, under the Canada Shipping Act?

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and the Environment): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Law of the Sea Conference, which is addressing itself to these very questions, should produce more positive results than we have had so far. I certainly join with my United States counterpart in deploring the fact that tankers that are badly equipped—I am not saying this one is because I have no way of knowing what the fundamental problem was—should be plying waters that are a potential risk to coastal states. The regulatory powers are vested in the Ministry of Transport—powers governing approach to Canadian shores.

EQUIPMENT AND ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO UNITED STATES
TO HELP PREVENT CONTAMINATION OF COASTLINE

Mr. Bill Jarvis (Perth-Wilmot): A final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that this event is one of the first occasions for the implementation of the joint Canada-United States marine pollution contingency plan, will the minister indicate what action Canada is taking under the plan to assist the United States in preventing the environmental contamination of her coastline? Specifically, can the minister give any indication of the personnel and equipment being made available or ready to be made available to the United States Coastguard?

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and the Environment): Mr. Speaker, we have indicated to the United States authorities that we would make all the resources we have available to them if the slick moves to their coast. I might say