

Oral Questions

Mr. Harvey (Edmonton East): This being the case, Mr. Speaker, might I offer the Deputy Prime Minister or any other government front-bencher right now this challenge: Will any of you debate the GST with me in Alberta?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, I will now alter my planned question. I will alter it by simply saying to the Deputy Prime Minister, since you will not respond to my colleague from Alberta, is there anyone over there who will debate the GST in British Columbia?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, first of all the hon. member should honour the Speaker's ruling. If he would be fair and truthful to the House, he would recognize that I was prepared to answer the member for Edmonton East, and I am prepared to answer now.

• (1430)

Yesterday hon. members opposite wanted to debate with the finance minister on the floor of the House of Commons. They debated and they lost.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. William Rompkey (Labrador): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence, the person who occupies that position for the time being. He stood idly by during the presentation of the last budget and saw Canadian sovereignty eroded severely on both coasts.

For example, the Tracker aircraft which protected Canadian coasts against illegal fishing, illegal drugs and illegal pollution was scrapped and the fisheries portion was given to the private sector at twice the cost.

At a time when the fishery is in crisis, how can the minister stand by and see Canadian sovereignty taken from the Armed Forces and given to mercenaries?

Will he guarantee that this time around he will stand up to the Minister of Finance and say there is no way he

will take Canadian sovereignty off the east or the west coast from the Armed Forces and that he will protect our coasts against illegal fishing and against illegal pollution? Will he do that?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleague's new-found interest in his critic's responsibilities. It is nice to see him back.

The decision to remove the Trackers from service was taken because Canada has interest in security. If we are not able to bring about the economic security this country needs to continue to grow and to provide the dollars so we can have military or defensive security, we will be in a much worse position than we are today.

The opportunity to provide a commercial outlet or operation with the surveillance under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is not new. It is something that we have used to add to the surveillance. There has been additional money provided to fisheries and oceans so that it can provide surveillance on both coasts. It is not as the member would attest.

Hon. William Rompkey (Labrador): Mr. Speaker, the argument that the deficit is somehow fought by spending twice as much on the private sector as on the Armed Forces does not hold water with me or with any other Canadian.

In addition, four frigates are now going to be cut from the frigate program at a time when we need increased surveillance. The Atlantic fishery is in crisis. We need ships. We need patrol ships to protect against illegal fishing, against illegal drugs and against illegal pollution. How can the minister justify this kind of cut at a time when we need those ships most?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the hon. member is aware, but the government is proceeding with the construction of 12 frigates. It has been announced and we are proceeding with them.

We are proceeding with the update of the Tribal class. We are proceeding to put those vessels into retrofit and to create new vessels, some 12 new frigates. I am not sure where the hon. member has been when he talks about cutting four frigates.