

*Oral Questions*

Committee members from the Bloc Québécois have dissociated themselves from this report, after the Liberals refused to reconsider Canada's participation in NATO and NORAD and in UN peacekeeping forces.

Considering that only 13 per cent of Canadian defence infrastructure is located in Quebec, while Quebecers meet approximately 25 per cent of Canadian defence expenditures, can the minister undertake to take into account this imbalance that is unfavourable to Quebec before making any cuts whatsoever?

[English]

**Hon. David Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it sounds to me as if the hon. member is reflecting upon the position taken by his defence critic in response to the committee's report and that is that the Bloc Québécois advocates defence spending be reduced in Canada and Quebec of course as part of Canada by 25 per cent.

I do not think that is widely known. It was said in the election and it has been reiterated. That is very interesting.

With respect to the report of the hon. members, I have read it with interest. I have read the report of the defence committee. All the members of the House and Senate who took part should be congratulated.

The government will certainly consider its recommendations in the development of the new defence policy.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, given that Quebec already receives proportionately less than its fair share in terms of military equipment, can the Minister of Defence dissociate himself from the defence committee today and give this House the assurance that unacceptable decisions such as the closure of the military college in Saint-Jean will not be repeated in the case of Bagotville or Saint-Hubert?

[English]

**Hon. David Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the only comment I wish to make is that as a result of the budget cuts that we announced in February of this year defence spending in Quebec actually increased by 3 per cent. That was because of the severity of cuts elsewhere in the country.

• (1450)

I have said this before in the House. We will look at the committee's report. We will look at the report of the hon. member and his party and we will take all of that into consideration in the formulation of a new policy.

**ETHICS COUNSELLOR**

**Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not know for sure what it was but the other day he said the buck or the puck or whatever it is stops with him.

I have news for the Prime Minister. The buck stops with the Canadian people and they are fed up with governments that put political survival before integrity. The guidelines are clear. We have four different guidelines. Everyone of them makes it wrong for a minister to telephone or influence a judge or a quasi-judicial body in his control. That is clear. Yet we are not getting an answer.

**The Speaker:** I would ask my hon. colleague to please put the question.

**Mr. Epp:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Prime Minister promote public trust by giving the ethics counsellor full independence and have him report directly to the House of Commons?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the ethics counsellor has the mandate to report to the House of Commons once a year. He is invited to give advice to all sorts of people. Members of Parliament, ministers, everybody can consult him before doing something. These are private conversations, for example, with any member of Parliament who has a problem with conflict of interest. He is there to give advice but he does not have to report on every case. He gives advice to people. He gave advice to me.

At the end of the day I am responsible. Yes, I said the buck or the puck stops with me and I do not run away when it is coming.

**Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Prime Minister that he made a red book promise to give the Canadian people an independent ethics counsellor. I do not know why he is now so afraid of that independence.

Will the Prime Minister cut the political strings between his office and the office of the ethics counsellor? If not, why not? Also, how does he balance his response with his own needs and the expectations of Canadians?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for the first time we have an ethics counsellor who will report to the House of Commons once a year. He is there to advise everybody, including myself.

He gave me advice and he gave advice to other people. It is up to the person who received the advice to keep it or not, but at the end of the day the decision is made by the minister or by the Prime Minister. In this case it is me and I am not afraid to take my responsibility.