

The harsh reality, moreover, is that a United Nations presence in Cambodia may well be required for a considerable period of time after the May election. The premature withdrawal of UN forces from Cambodia could well lead to the renewal of the armed conflict which for decades has tragically characterized the history of this troubled country.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

HELICOPTER PROGRAM

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

I am told that earlier today in Vancouver the Minister of National Defence was asked whether she would choose between a national day care program and the military helicopter program. She said it was an unfair choice, a Hobson's choice, one that she would not make. She in fact made her choice, saying yes to the helicopters and no to day care.

Does the Minister of Finance agree with her choice, or will he scale back or cancel the helicopter program in his upcoming budget?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's comments are an absolute distortion of what the Minister of National Defence had to say. I think it is very unfair for him to put that kind of an interpretation on the matter.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, the transcript of the minister's remarks is there and I do not see why in the light of her significance in his party he could not answer the question.

I am going to ask him a supplementary, based on a report today by Canadian Press which says that supporters of the proposed new anti-submarine helicopters admit the aircraft would be virtually useless at guarding Canadian waters of the Arctic where nuclear submarines spend a lot of their time. The Canadian Press goes on to say that even the navy acknowledges there is no way to get sub-detecting sensors through the ice.

If the Minister of Finance is truly interested in sound management of public funds, should this information not

Oral Questions

make him re-think the acceptability and viability of this \$5.8 billion helicopter program?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, each year the House allocates to the Department of National Defence sums of money under which it operates. It spends about 25 per cent of those sums on capital equipment each year renewing equipment.

A defence committee of this House unanimously agreed, with every party represented, that in fact there needed to be a replacement for the aging Sea King helicopters and that the replacement should be the EH-101. It could look after its role with the frigates in terms of sovereignty patrol, fisheries patrol, drug interdiction and anti-submarine if necessary, as well as search and rescue.

The reality is if the EH-101 contract were to be cancelled it would put the defence department in a situation where the frigates were unusable and we would not be able to rescue Canadians who were in distress in bad weather.

• (1420)

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question, again for the Minister of Finance.

According to the Canadian Press, Fred Crickard, a retired rear admiral and a member of the Naval Officers' Association said: "The passive sonar equipment on the EH-101 would be very unsatisfactory even if you could get the sonabuoy (sensors) down, which you cannot".

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, in the light of this statement, I want to ask the minister why the Minister of Finance insists on including the \$5.8 billion helicopter program in the government's Main Estimates. Why can the minister not himself answer this straightforward question, since he is responsible for managing the government's finances?

[English]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to be implying that Canada should acquire the capability of pursuing submarines under the ice pack as part of our sovereignty.