

Oral Questions

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the opposition speaks in very simplistic terms about the licence. A licence, whether it be this licence or any other licence granted by this government, can be suspended or quashed but only under one very fundamental rule of law; there has to be some kind of breach or some kind of violation of the terms and conditions of the licence. I have been discussing this with our legal advisers. There has been no breach or no violation of this particular licence.

We are pursuing in the courts the avenues that are open to us to allow the process to be completed and that is by appealing the judgment that was handed down last Thursday. We are doing that this week. We will continue in that pursuit.

I would like to tell my hon. colleague that the best way to avoid these kinds of circumstances in the future is for him and his party to strongly support Bill C-78, which would finally put some order in environmental assessment.

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PERSIAN GULF

Mr. John Brewin (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Associate Minister of National Defence. As the House will know, three members of the House from the defence committee, including myself, were in the Persian Gulf last week. May I say we were all very impressed with the professionalism, the competence and the innovativeness of our troops who are there.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Brewin: However, we are not quite so impressed with the performance of the government on this issue, Mr. Speaker. On September 26 the Minister of National Defence made a solemn commitment to this House:

—before any changes are made to the mission that Canadian forces are involved in at this time in support of the United Nations sanctions, resolution 665, that of deterring aggression, they will have to be consulted and we will have to make that change in Canada.

This weekend there were reports, apparently clear and documented, that Canadian forces in the gulf were going far beyond the enforcement of the UN sanctions and were in fact involved, albeit in a defensive say, in the

support of so-called Operation Imminent Thunder, an offensive exercise near the Kuwaiti border.

Will the minister explain why the Minister of National Defence did not keep his commitment to this House?

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister responsible for Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to thank the hon. member for his very kind and accurate words about the work that our men and women are doing in the Persian Gulf, as I am sure he is aware, having been there, in a very difficult situation. I know those words will be appreciated by them.

I would like to assure my colleague that our role in the Persian Gulf has not changed. Our role is to enforce the UN sanctions against Iraq and to deter aggression. That will continue to be our role. Any change in that mandate would have to be considered by the government and, we would hope, by Parliament.

Yes, we did participate in the exercise over the weekend, albeit, as the member indicated, in a minor role. We assisted in the patrols; we assisted in escorting the U.S. hospital ships; and we participated, as the member has indicated, in a defensive capacity in an air operation to test out command and control capabilities of the multinational forces which are operating in the area.

Mr. John Brewin (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, the minister has just confirmed a clear escalation of Canadian policy without consulting Parliament.

I would like to ask a supplementary question. Last week the Prime Minister indicated that there were going to be substantial cutbacks. Reports have stated that as much as half a billion dollars in government programs, presumably further affecting social programs in this country, will be cut to pay for the cost of the Canadian contingent. While we were there it was made clear to us, and this was confidential information, that the incremental costs were nowhere close to that. I would like to ask the minister if she will make it clear publicly in this House the incremental costs of the Canadian contingent in the gulf.

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister responsible for Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, first of all I am surprised. I would think my hon. colleague would want to ensure that our men and women are prepared to deal with any kind of contingen-