

Oral Questions

The Minister of the Environment is credited with giving us the Canadair water bomber program as the first of the special recovery projects. I would like to ask the Minister, who has been involved in the purchase of four Canadair water bombers at a cost of \$6 million each for the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, for an explanation. The fire season in the Yukon starts April 1 and there is ice on the lakes through April, most of May, and sometimes into June. How does the Minister expect fires to be fought in Yukon before the ice melts and the water bombers can be used? Or is he just going to let the Yukon burn?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of Supply and Services): Madam Speaker, again I am amazed at the particular attitude of the hon. lady relating to the water bombers. She seems to be developing a vendetta against a piece of Canadian technology which has been received very well in the international arena. As well, Madam Speaker, it is a piece of technology which has been very successful in making the Province of Quebec the leader in protecting its forest resources. Of course we all recognize in Canada that a large portion of both our direct and indirect employment is owing to the forest industry, and we should seek every possible method of protecting that industry. I can assure the hon. lady, Madam Speaker, that, whoever provides her with the information, either she is misinterpreting it or she is inadvertently misleading this House.

REBUILDING OF ENGINES IN MIAMI

Miss Pat Carney (Vancouver Centre): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Supply and Services. We are not talking about Quebec. We are talking about Yukon, an area of the country where the Leader of the Opposition comes from, and where I have spent a lot of time.

We have ten-year averages for forest fires in Yukon. The ten-year average for Yukon has been two in April, 15 in May, and 31 in June. In the Northwest Territories, on a ten-year average, there have been two in April, 15 in May, and 80 in June. As of yesterday, there were three forest fires this year in Yukon.

The Minister has not addressed the question of how he is going to use his water bombers.

I have another question for the Minister. Canadair uses old Pratt & Whitney engines which have not been produced for 15 years. They have been contracting with a Miami company to rebuild these engines to Canadair's specifications.

Madam Speaker: Order. The question of the Hon. Member is becoming a bit long. Would she go directly to her question?

Miss Carney: My question, Madam Speaker, is the following. Of what benefit to Canada is the rebuilding of aircraft engines in Miami?

• (1430)

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of Supply and Services): Madam Speaker, with reference to the Yukon, the hon. lady herself admitted that the bulk of the fires took place during the month of June, at a time when indeed the lakes are clear of ice.

Mr. Nielsen: No.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blais: As well, if the hon. lady has read the reports on the water bombers she will know that in periods when there may be ice on the lakes there is a capacity of that aircraft to use chemical retardants.

Not only that, the airstrip that is required for the water bombers is about 3,500 feet, which is about 1,500 feet less than the length required for the DC-8 which is also employed in British Columbia for the same purpose.

Mr. Nielsen: A DC-8?

Mr. Blais: Madam Speaker, the aircraft that is used in British Columbia is much inferior. It requires another 1,500 feet of airstrip in order to be able to serve the purposes for which it is required.

USE OF CHEMICAL FIRE RETARDANTS

Miss Pat Carney (Vancouver Centre): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is also directed to the Minister of Supply and Services. He has spoken about the need to use chemical retardants in the Yukon. May I point out that the reason given by the Department of the Environment for using the water bombers is a \$93 million savings in chemical retardants. If he is going to save \$93 million in chemical retardants by using free water, can he explain why he is now going to use chemical retardants in the Yukon?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of Supply and Services): Because, Madam Speaker, the aircraft has the ability to use water in periods when there are high fire incidents, and indeed is able to use the lakes within the Yukon or any place else in Canada. In the periods of time when in areas where they indeed cannot make use of water—

Mr. Kempling: Try ice cubes.

Mr. Blais: —it also has the capacity to use chemical retardants. It can do that much more competently than any other aircraft that is developed for the use of fire retardants. That is the reason why.