

THE SENATE

Wednesday, July 12, 1995

The Senate met at 1:30 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

TRANSPORT

REPLACEMENT OF SEARCH AND RESCUE HELICOPTER AT YARMOUTH, NOVA SCOTIA

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau: Honourable senators, I rise today to express my shock and outrage at the decision by the Liberal government to replace the all-weather rescue and surveillance helicopter in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia with a Coast Guard utility chopper. I was even more surprised at this announcement, given that it was only a year ago that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was in my area promising that, without question, the helicopter would remain there. In fact, my understanding is that, at that time, he said that the chopper would remain there "until hell freezes over."

I cannot stress enough how important this helicopter is in ensuring the safety of our fishermen who are at risk while at work on the high seas. I know all too well the importance of having an adequate search and rescue helicopter on patrol. In fact, as the Member of Parliament for the area at the time, I was the one who made sure that an all-weather helicopter, the Sikorsky S-76, was finally provided to the fishermen in my area in 1988 by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Since then, the chopper has been involved in numerous search and rescue operations at sea and has saved the lives of many fishermen.

It is absolutely unacceptable that the Liberal government should try to rationalize its decision by citing the financial savings of using a chopper from the Canadian Coast Guard. They fail to mention that the BO-105 cannot fly in bad weather, or on most nights, which is precisely the type of conditions which require the use of these choppers. As well, the BO-105 can only fly short distances.

For the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans even to suggest that the savings to be derived from switching helicopters justifies his decision is shocking. What price does this Liberal government put on the lives of fishermen who will be put at risk by this decision?

Although I understand that the merger of the Canadian Coast Guard with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has played a role in this decision, I call upon the government to halt immediately its plans for replacing the Sikorsky S-76 and reconsider its options. Given the impending announcement of the

new search, rescue and surveillance helicopters to replace the Labrador and Sea Kings, I suggest that the government simply extend its contract with Canadian Helicopters for the Sikorsky S-76 until such time as the new helicopters are ready to be put into service.

Only in that way can we ensure that our fishermen are being properly protected with the necessary equipment as they head out to sea, sometimes as far away as Georges Banks. Our fishermen and their families in Nova Scotia deserve no less.

PARKS CANADA

RESTORED FORTRESS AT LOUISBOURG, NOVA SCOTIA—FESTIVITIES 1995

Hon. B. Alasdair Graham (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I should like to take this opportunity to remind the chamber that this summer, both the Fortress and the Town of Louisbourg in Cape Breton will play host to one of the most exciting festivals in North America commemorating, in turn, Fortress Louisbourg's 275th birthday, the 250th anniversary of the first siege of the military installations, and the 100th anniversary of the Sydney-to-Louisbourg railway.

Those of you who have already visited the reconstructed site will know that Louisbourg predates Quebec as a milestone in our history. The fortress town arose from Louis XIV's rather extravagant vision of empire and, at its zenith, was considered to be the mightiest military bastion in the New World, or the Gibraltar of Canada, as some historians have put it.

In fact, the defence works cost so much that the impoverished Sun King, as Louis was known, once swore in frustration that he would awaken in Versailles one morning to see the spires of Louisbourg rising above the western horizon.

At one time, Louisbourg was as important as New York, more populous than any place in Canada, and the only walled city of its kind on the North American continent. Much more than a fortress, it was, in its short lifespan, a metropolitan sea port bulging with trade and intrigue.

In the siege of 1758, the fortified city was completely demolished, and there it remained for over 200 years, a forlorn pile of broken stone and charred wood located on a rocky, misty finger of land on the southeast corner of Cape Breton Island. It was not until the early 1960s that federal initiatives were taken to reconstruct the fortress as a means of putting unemployed miners in Cape Breton back to work. All that in the wake of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Coal, made in 1960.