

NATIONAL FINANCE

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO MEET
DURING SITTING OF THE SENATE

Leave having been given to proceed to Order No. 116 (Notices of Motions):

Hon. Lowell Murray, pursuant to notice of Thursday, November 23, 1995, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance have power to sit at four o'clock in the afternoon, Tuesday, November 28, 1995, even though the Senate may then be sitting, and that rule 95(4) be suspended in relation thereto.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTION PERIOD

QUEBEC

PRIME MINISTER'S PROPOSALS—MEANS OF GAINING NECESSARY
CONSENT OF PROVINCES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Lowell Murray: Honourable senators, my question arises from the statement made by Prime Minister Chrétien yesterday concerning measures to be placed before Parliament, measures of a non-constitutional character but touching upon the Constitution. In particular, I draw the leader's attention to the undertaking by the Prime Minister that Justice Minister Rock will table a bill in the House of Commons on Wednesday that will require the consent of Quebec, Ontario, and the Atlantic and western regions before any constitutional amendment can be proposed in Parliament by the Government of Canada.

There are many questions which arise from that, but my question is, how will that consent be obtained? Is it to be obtained in consultation with the governments of those provinces, through the legislative assemblies of those provinces, or by way of referendum?

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have asked myself this question: What does "direct consent" mean? The Prime Minister has outlined the three obvious options, and, as I understand it, it would be up to the federal government to decide which route would be chosen.

I need to get more information on that point myself, but the options laid out were the three that the honourable senator has mentioned, these being a direct executive-provincial government approach, a legislative assembly approach, or referendum.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I presume, however, that the bill will not be silent on the matter. I presume the bill

will state how the federal government would obtain that consent. It would not be left to some future discretion of the federal government, would it?

Senator Fairbairn: Honourable senators, I have not seen the detailed bill. It will be out tomorrow.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

SEARCH AND RESCUE HELICOPTER REPLACEMENT PROGRAM—
REQUEST FOR TABLING OF STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENTS AND
REPORT ON SEARCH AND RESCUE CAPABILITY REQUIREMENTS

Hon. J. Michael Forrestall: Honourable senators, my question for the Leader of the Government relates to the purchase of the 15 new search and rescue helicopters. There appears to be somewhat of an air of secrecy surrounding the details of the purchase of this new equipment. Apparently the Statement of Requirements, which includes pertinent information on performance capability requirements, is not readily available from the Department of National Defence.

Given the difficulties we are having in obtaining this document, could the Leader of the Government please give us an undertaking to obtain and table that particular document for us?

• (1420)

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I can give my honourable friend an undertaking that I will attempt to do that.

Senator Forrestall: Honourable senators, given that the government has indicated that there is no secrecy regarding the requirements for this new equipment, could the Leader of the Government in the Senate also provide us with a copy of the Search and Rescue Capability Requirements Report prepared by the Director of Air Operational Requirements in June of 1990? Perhaps the honourable leader could also advise this chamber whether that document was, in fact, updated in conjunction with the purchase of this new equipment, and if so, could she provide senators with the updated document?

Senator Fairbairn: Honourable senators, with respect to all of those questions, I will be in touch with the Minister of National Defence. I will see what I can find out on behalf of my honourable colleague.

Senator Forrestall: Honourable senators, the reason for the importance of having these documents tabled is to ascertain the priorities of the government in terms of what these search and rescue helicopters will be equipped to do. The 1990 Statement of Requirements states very plainly:

Some inherent subjectivity exists in quantifying SAR requirements; speed, range and capacity are examples where any decision for greater or lesser capability would undoubtedly result in lives saved or not saved in the future.