

Oral Questions

• (1420)

Can the President of the Treasury Board assure Canadians today that these cuts will be no more than is actually necessary to finance these military operations. Will he assure Canadians that these cuts will not be carried out at the expense of less advantaged Canadians and regions that, in this time of recession, need the help and the assistance of government, more than ever?

Hon. Gilles Loiselle (President of the Treasury Board and Minister of State (Finance)): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the Leader of the Opposition that I will be introducing supplementary estimates tomorrow at 12 o'clock and he will have all the information he wants.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, will the President of the Treasury Board confirm today that the cost of having our forces in the Persian Gulf is \$3 million a month and not the \$50 million a month which officials have been suggesting is the case to journalists and others in the country?

[*Translation*]

It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that the President of the Treasury Board refuses to assure Canadians that the cuts he announced will not affect the programs they depend on the most. I ask the minister, the President of the Treasury Board—and I am referring to Health and Welfare Canada—how he can assure the Canadian people that the quality of our health services and medical research will not be affected by those cuts?

Hon. Gilles Loiselle (President of the Treasury Board and Minister of State (Finance)): Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat to the opposition leader, in the other official language, that I do intend to table at noon tomorrow Estimates that will reflect the responsible decisions this government always takes.

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[*English*]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Minister of Finance. He will no doubt be aware that yesterday's bankruptcy figures confirmed Canadians' worst fears: the largest number of bankruptcies in the history of Canada. The government must know that the GST will be the final nail in the Canadian economic coffin. The poll tax crushed the iron lady. The GST will kill this government. Will the Prime

Minister not learn from Margaret Thatcher's mistake and today kill the GST?

Hon. John McDermid (Minister of State (Privatization and Regulatory Affairs)): Mr. Speaker, over the past 50 years there have been four royal commissions and numerous committee reports, including one from the Senate of Canada chaired by the Hon. Allan MacEa-chen, which recommended that this country get rid of the antiquated manufacturers' sales tax and bring in a modern sales tax, a consumption tax, like the goods and services tax. That has been the recommendation for over 50 years.

No other previous government had the guts to do it. We may understand today why they did not have the guts to do it, but they did not have the guts to do it. It is a necessary change. It was campaigned on in the election of 1988. The answer is: "No, we will not stop the goods and services tax. No, it is not going to defeat the government". If the hon. member came to her senses, she would take a walk down the hall and convince her friends to pass the goods and services tax so that business communities of Canada can get on with the job.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, the minister no doubt will be aware that the current GST bill is so badly drafted that the Department of Finance is already working on retroactive amendments which they intend to introduce shortly after January of next year.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm to the House that there is currently a list of retroactive amendments being drawn up by the Department of Finance and will he in fact table those amendments today so all Canadians can see how flawed this GST bill is and will he withdraw the GST?

Hon. John McDermid (Minister of State (Privatization and Regulatory Affairs)): Mr. Speaker, I guess I did not say it slowly enough the first time. No, we will not withdraw the goods and services tax. It is necessary for the economic well-being of this country. We have not said that. Outside organizations have said that. Any number of them have, including the Retail Council of Canada, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association and I can go on and on. As a matter of fact, 17 of them appeared recently before the Senate and made a very strong recommendation that the Senate pass the goods and services tax immediately, so that they can get on with the business of creating employment and wealth in this country. The goods and services tax is going to make it fairer for them to do business in this country and throughout the world. That is what this is all about,